



## Rwanda Strategy for Sustainable Graduation: An overview

### Summary for Refugee Response Stakeholders in Uganda

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), the Government of Rwanda launched the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation, which was approved by Cabinet in November 2022. The overarching objective of the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation in Rwanda is to enable households below the poverty line who have the potential to graduate from poverty to reach a status where they have a sustainable livelihood which is resilient to moderate shocks without needing social protection support. The present brief highlights some of the key elements of this strategy. Take a look at the full Strategy here: <https://www.minaloc.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=57400&token=ebdc71608f1687253826e20e38990beebefe5c85>

This brief is produced by U-Learn to inform the ongoing reflections on graduation programming in Uganda.

**NOTE: This brief has been submitted for review by the Government of Rwanda and feedback is pending.**

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## Definition

In the Strategy, graduation is defined as the rising of households over and above the poverty line so that they are no longer categorised as poor. The poverty line is assessed and set by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda<sup>1</sup> (NISR). According to this definition graduation only occurs where households rising above the poverty line remain above the line permanently (no churning).

## How was the strategy developed?

The National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation strategy is part of the 7-year National Strategy for Transformation 2017–2024<sup>1</sup> which lists graduation as a strategic intervention under the social transformation pillar. A consortium of partners supported the Government of Rwanda to inform the design of the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation. As one of the implementing agencies of social protection programmes, the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) is coordinating the implementation of the Graduation Strategy among key stakeholders (development partners, districts and NGOs/CSOs).

Evaluations findings from the Minimum Package for Graduation, a pilot initiative implemented by BRAC, informed the development of the Strategy. BRAC technical experts also provided high-level inputs during the development of the graduation strategy and supported partner coordination across sectors.

### Some Learnings from the Strategy Development

- **Importance of coordination between sectors and data sharing.**
- **Graduation cannot be delivered according to a one size fit all plan.**
- **Enabling graduation is a process.**

Following the approval of the Strategy in November 2022, a national dialogue was held in Kigali with actors in the social protection sector including Ministers, Governors, heads of government institutions, Development partners, UN agencies and CSOs and private sector representatives. A graduation secretariat, which will be the office responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation, is in the process of being established with the support of the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) and of BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative (UPGI).

## Participants or beneficiaries?

It is common in social protection policies and dialogues to refer to recipients of social protection support as beneficiaries. However, the nature of graduation is inconsistent with the idea of a beneficiary because it implies empowered citizens pushing for fulfilment of their rights. The Rwanda strategy refers to them as graduation participants. The Strategy clearly states that households without labour capacity are not expected to graduate since they lack the means to embark on a trajectory towards sustainable livelihoods. This includes some people with disabilities, the elderly, children and others without labour capacity. Such households should receive social protection support without a time limit.

<sup>1</sup> In 2016/17, 38.2% of the population lived under the national poverty line and 16.1% under the extreme poverty line. More information on the national poverty line and international poverty line here: [https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext\\_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global\\_POVEQ\\_RWA.pdf](https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_RWA.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [Rwanda National Strategy for Transformation 2017-2024](#)

# Key components of the graduation framework in Rwanda's National Strategy

## 7 Pillars

**The graduation framework lists seven key pillars:**

1. Contribution of income transfers
2. Effective multi-sectoral support for sustainable livelihoods
3. Access to appropriate public and other non-state services
4. An enabling environment for sustainable graduation maintained
5. Participant realities are understood and support is effective
6. Alignment of policy and institutional arrangements
7. Lesson-learning and adaptive management inform performance

The first four pillars relate to delivery of services and support to graduation participants while the final three relate to effective ways of working and enablers to graduation.

**“Graduation is not only about social protection and requires a multi-sectoral approach”**

**The graduation framework lists six principles:**

**Principle 1.** Community awareness and sensitisation

**Principle 2.** Coordinated action of key stakeholders through a multi sectoral approach

**Principle 3.** Defined criteria for household targeting

**Principle 4.** An enabling environment to sustainable graduation

**Principle 5.** Defined timeline: two years with overlapping inputs in the third year

**Principle 6.** Shock responsive social protection interventions in the event of a shock which threatens to push the household back into or further into poverty

## 6 Principles



## Targeting

The target for the Graduation Strategy in Rwanda is the population under the poverty line and extreme poverty line with labour capacity for graduation potential<sup>3</sup>. Graduation potential implies those households with ability to work but have limited opportunities or assets to sustain their livelihoods. Along the graduation pathways participant households will be linked with agricultural services to ensure food security. Depending on the households capacities, they are categorised as 'fast movers' or 'slow movers' and receive support tailored accordingly.

Households who benefit from effective livelihood development programmes and multisectoral interventions and who access complementary basic services and markets are expected to graduate within two years. However, the policy also states that this expectation is not achievable in case of disruptive shocks, particularly climate disasters.

### Sustainable graduation or the importance of avoiding 'churning'?

'Churning' describes the situation where a household moves above the poverty line but then for some reason falls back below it. It is therefore imperative that social protection programmes and graduation strategies are designed to respond to these types of shocks to prevent households which have made progress from falling back into poverty.

**"Not everyone who is poor is expected to graduate"**

### Graduation for Refugees

Transitioning refugees from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance is a major policy objective in Rwanda<sup>4</sup>. The Graduation Strategy does not cover refugees in Rwanda but favourable policies in relation to access to work support this aspiration to supporting self-reliance.

Refugees only need valid identification, rather than a work permit like other foreign residents, to enjoy their right to work. However, access to formal work is not yet a reality for most. The overwhelming majority of refugees still live in camps where job opportunities are scarce and infrastructure poor, including a lack of electricity. Refugees are also bound by a 6pm curfew (return to camp) and face non-legal barriers in accessing employment such as discrimination, limited capital to grow their businesses, unawareness of refugees' rights to work among some private sector actors, and a lack of data on refugee skills that would help match them with job opportunities in the country.

Moving forward, including with the upcoming Refugee Response Plan 2024, there is an objective to decrease the dependence of refugees on humanitarian assistance including by aligning with efforts towards graduation. A stable provision of critical services would be a prerequisite for this type of interventions to succeed.

<sup>3</sup> 16.1% of the population live under the extreme poverty line, i.e. 497,000 households in 2016/17 - irrespective of their labour capacity. Source: the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation.

<sup>4</sup> Leghtas and Kitenge, 2023.

# Institutional arrangements

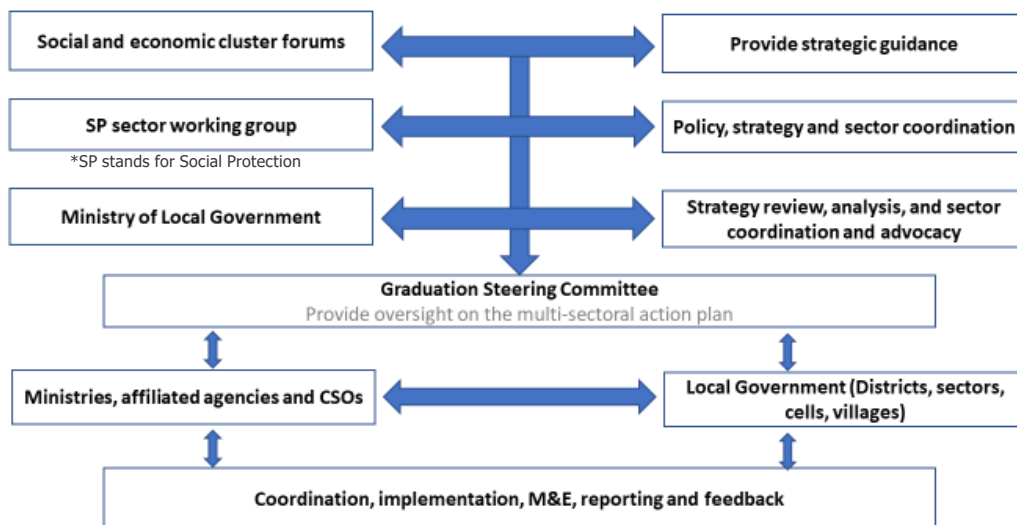
The National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation, led by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), establishes a strategic shift toward holistic approaches to poverty alleviation that is articulated in both the National Strategy for Transformation (2017–2024) and the National Social Protection Strategy (2017–2024). The Strategy has laid a clear division of roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders across government and various sectors including civil society and others to adopt the Graduation approach. The Graduation Secretariat will be in charge of coordinating its implementation, under the leadership of MINALOC.

Stakeholders at national and district level in implementing the Graduation Strategy in Rwanda are working towards a Joint Action Plan for Sustainable Graduation. This plan will ensure planning and budgeting for interventions that either contribute to the creation of an enabling environment or that form direct inputs to enhance graduation or both.

A Steering committee composed of permanent secretaries and heads of agencies from the social and economic clusters will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary of MINALOC and co-chaired by the Permanent Secretary from the Economic cluster lead. This coordination framework is also replicated at a decentralised level.

**Governance arrangements for delivery of the graduation joint action plan for sustainable graduation. National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation (page 36).**

## Governance framework for the graduation strategy



## Costing and financing for the graduation package

The Graduation Strategy in Rwanda estimates the cost of supporting a household towards graduation to be between RWF 800,000 (USD 650) and RWF 1,685,000 (USD 1,400) depending on the pre-existing capacities of the household (fast or slow movers). This model is based on evidence and experience from other programmes that have been implemented.

In the first scenario at RWF 1,685,000 (USD 1,400), the participating household is supported over the period of two-three years to sustainably graduate out of poverty. The cost estimate is based on provision of safety net payments (two years); productive asset transfer (one year) and skills development such as financial literacy or entrepreneurship (one year). This also includes health insurance and livelihood-related services facilitated by para-social workers to provide advisory and coaching services for a period of three years.

Alternatively, a participating household can be provided with a sizable one-off cash transfer (block transfer) of RWF 800,000 (USD 650) for a period of one year and coaching and advisory services for two years to enable a rapid graduation out of poverty. This type of assistance is targeted to those that have the potential to graduate and already reside in a conducive environment that can sustain the household's livelihood development.

The Graduation Secretariat is developing a financing strategy for the implementation.



# A few examples of ongoing Graduation programmes in Rwanda follow (not exhaustive)

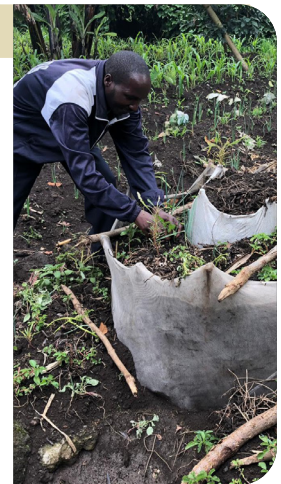


## The Ultra-Poor Graduation programme by WVI

Under the Ultra-Poor Graduation programme in Rwanda, World Vision<sup>5</sup> International provides extremely poor households with a pathway out of poverty by helping families engage in a productive and resilient livelihood. The project has 4 pillars including social protection, livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion and social empowerment. Some of the activities include technical and business skills training, access to formal banking facilities and life skills training among others. One of the key interventions in line with the Graduation Strategy in Rwanda is the provision of a one-off RWF 800.000 (USD 650) grant to start a business. World Vision International also uses a graduation approach under its Building Secure Livelihood project. In 2023, a total of 69,000 households are reported to have graduated under both projects.

## The BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative (UPGI)

BRAC UPGI is a global program within the BRAC network. In Rwanda, BRAC<sup>6</sup> is working with the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) and Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) with funding support from UNICEF. In 2015, MINALOC approved the implementation of an initiative known as the 'Minimum Package for Graduation'. The Minimum Package for Graduation was intended to deliver a defined package of core social protection services and complementary interventions with a view to strengthening household productivity and resilience. The evaluation's findings and recommendations<sup>7</sup> have since informed a number of key activities in the social protection sector in Rwanda including the design of the National Graduation Strategy. BRAC UPGI is continuing its partnership with the Government of Rwanda to provide technical advisory support in defining, tracking, and measuring the Graduation approach.



## Green Graduation Programme by Concern Worldwide

Between 2017 and 2022, 2,700 vulnerable households in Gisagara district in southern Rwanda took part in Concern International's Graduation programme which included the provision of cash transfers, coaching and mentoring, access to financial services and business skills training. Since 2023, a new Green Graduation Programme<sup>8</sup> was launched to reach 1,200 families living in extreme poverty in two districts. It strives to address social and economic inequalities whilst taking a transformative approach to tackling negative environmental practice and improving the efficiency and sustainability of natural resources/assets. The implementation takes place directly through Government departments.

## Scaling Sustainable Poverty Graduation by Village Enterprise

With USAID Development Innovation Ventures funding granted in 2023, Village Enterprise<sup>9</sup> will partner with the Government of Rwanda to implement a wide-scale pilot of its poverty graduation program with 21,000 Rwandan households and train government staff to lead implementation of a pilot program with an additional 8,000 households.



See page 8 for footnotes 5 to 9.

## Weblinks to examples of ongoing Graduation programmes in Rwanda (see page 7)

5 <https://www.wvi.org/publications/rwanda/wor%20ld-vision-international-rwanda-annual-report-2022>

6 <https://bracupgi.org/program/rwanda/>

7 <https://bracupgi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Rwanda-Evaluation-Progress-Brief-BRAC-UPGI.pdf>

8 <https://www.concern.net/news/it-gave-me-hope-how-graduation-programme-making-difference-rwanda>

9 <https://divportal.usaid.gov/s/project/a0g3d000000cIK2AAM/scaling-sustainable-poverty-graduation>

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