Practical pathways to coaching in Graduation programmes

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A framework to provide evidence-based guidance on programmatic design to implementers



Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Graduation programmes in addressing extreme poverty and enhancing participants' economic prospects and overall well-being. These studies have shown that the approach can travel across continents and be adapted to work across a range of different social and economic realities. However, whilst governments have been interested in the impact the approach has had, many have struggled to implement high-quality programmes. When governments directly lead programme implementation, a number of challenges and opportunities arise. One of the key areas where new and innovative ideas are required in government-led Graduation implementation is around how to achieve large-scale impact while maintaining programme quality, despite frequent limitations in budget and human resources associated with public programmes.

Coaching is often considered the cornerstone of Graduation programmes, yet it's also one of the most challenging aspects to implement due to its holistic nature and reliance on trained personnel. Additionally, coaching design is influenced by several factors, such as programme objectives, participants' needs, programme budget, available workforce, and existing infrastructure and partnerships. In the way the Graduation approach has been traditionally implemented, the coach also fulfils a range of functions linked to programme operations, all of which have been centralised in the motivated and highly trained on-the-ground workforce. As Graduation programmes expand through government initiatives, diverse approaches to coaching are emerging in different contexts. It is clear that adaptation is key: There is no bulletproof model for coaching. It is essential to rethink its design and implementation and explore innovative, context-specific approaches to make coaching both effective and scalable when integrated within government systems.

We at BRAC analysed evidence and innovations in coaching within Graduation programmes by reviewing RCTs, quasi-experimental studies, and programme documents (see complete bibliography at the end), while also drawing from our own experience. Using these insights, we developed a comprehensive framework to organise key findings and, more importantly, to expand our understanding of diverse coaching implementation strategies. This framework seeks to empower implementers to identify and adopt the approaches that best suit their specific contexts.

The framework focuses on seven key coaching variables adapted from the work of Sumanthiran and Roelen (2023). Each variable has different implementation modalities:

1. Size of in-person coaching sessions
2. Frequency of in-person contact with participants
3. Caseload (number of participants per coach)
4. Staffing options
5. Type of contact
6. Coaching support tools, including digital tools
7. Coaching tasks

In addition to highlighting key evidence where available, the framework provides practical guidance for people designing and implementing Graduation programmes, including setting out the pros and cons, trade-offs, and actionable recommendations for each variable and modality.

This framework is dynamic and will evolve over time, incorporating new evidence and practical experiences to ensure its recommendations remain relevant and effective. While grounded in a review of key literature, its core purpose is to translate the growing body of evidence on what works in coaching into actionable insights for governments and implementers who are currently designing and running large-scale Graduation programmes. The ethos underpinning the framework is that instead of focusing on how coaching ought to be delivered, the focus is on ensuring that the coaching received by participants is of the highest quality possible, given available or sustainably affordable resources. With this starting point, the framework equips programme designers with evidence-based strategies to work within a sustainable resource frame, understand trade-offs, and make informed design choices that can maximise impact.

1. Size of in-person coaching session

Evidence: Recent evidence points to group coaching as a more cost-effective alternative to one-on-one coaching. A three country RCT in Uganda, the Philippines, and Bangladesh compared the two approaches head-to-head and found similar impacts, but group coaching was fifteen to twenty percent cheaper (Beam et al. 2025). Other recent evaluations in Burkina Faso and Bangladesh, among others, point to group coaching as an effective model for Graduation programmes at scale, providing a way to reduce complexity and costs while retaining strong impacts (Zizzamia et al. 2023; Bossuroy et al. 2024).

However, many practitioners have observed that offering individual coaching in the beginning of the programme and/or as needed appears to offer critical support to the most vulnerable households, potentially increasing retention.

Some Graduation programmes opt for a mixed-method approach, using group sessions and individual coaching.

Implementation implications: The evidence shows that individual coaching is not the only way to drive positive results. Often, government-led Graduation programmes face relevant resource limitations (human and financial). In this case, opting for group sessions or a mixed method (group sessions + individual coaching) can be the best alternative to increase the programme's feasibility and potential for scale.



Large group session (between 11 and 30 people)	Small group session (less than 10 people)	Combination of individual and group sessions	Individual session/household visits
Low resource level*	**Intermediate resource level***	**Intermediate resource level***	**High resource level***
Implications: + Allow for higher caseloads and scale + Lower implementation costs (smaller workforce needed) + Allows for peer exchange and may strengthen participants' social capital – Harder to provide personalised assistance to participants – Coaches may miss aspects from participants' lives that are observable through household visits (eg.: GBV, child labour, etc) and that impact participants' progress – Participants may face difficulties in attending sessions, such as transportation costs, conflictive dates, and times – It may be hard to find adequate convening spaces that accommodate the whole group – Coaches need strong facilitation skills to ensure equitable engagement and learning among participants in a large group	**Implications:** + Allow for higher caseloads (compared to individual coaching) while also providing space for more personalised assistance (compared to larger group sessions) + Allows for peer exchange and may strengthen participants' social capital + Smaller groups are more easily managed by coaches than larger groups. Also, participants may have more opportunities to speak and less distractions – Coaches may miss aspects from participants' lives that are observable through household visits (eg.: GBV, child labour, etc) and that impact participants' progress – Participants may face difficulties in attending sessions, such as transportation costs, conflictive dates and times – Coaches need strong facilitation skills to ensure equitable engagement and learning among participants	**Implications:** + Provides a good balance between scale (group sessions) and personalised assistance (household visits) + Participants can develop an individualised relationship with coaches while also being able to interact and exchange with their peers (social capital) + Training methodology can be strengthened: personal/sensitive topics are discussed in individual sessions while topics that benefit from group discussions are addressed in group sessions + Coaches can more easily observe and address private aspects of participants' lives that impact their progress (eg.: GBV, child labour, etc) + Evidence shows that most Graduation programmes use this modality of coaching – Combines the logistical and operational challenges of both group and individual sessions – Requires a good level of coordination and planning – Coaches have to receive guidelines on how to conduct both individual and group sessions since they have different dynamics and require different skills	**Implications:** + Coaches get to know participants and their families very well and provide personalised assistance + Sessions generally happen at participants' houses (no transportation costs) and at moments that are suitable within their daily routines + Coaches can more easily observe and address private aspects of participants' lives that impact their progress (eg.: GBV, child labour, etc) – Require smaller caseloads and a larger workforce particularly if combined with weekly or bi-weekly visits – Higher implementation costs Does not encourage peer exchange and the development of social capital – Coaches may be more exposed to conflicts with family members (eg.: participants' male partners distrust male coaches or harass female coaches)

Key *+ pro* *– con*

** The resource level indicates the level of financial and human resources that are generally required to implement that particular modality.*

Large group session (between 11 and 30 people)	Small group session (less than 10 people)	Combination of individual and group sessions	Individual session/household visits
Low resource level*	**Intermediate resource level***	**Intermediate resource level***	**High resource level***
Recommendations if using this modality: • Coaches should leverage collective knowledge and promote peer-to-peer exchange, encouraging participants to share success stories and challenges as a way to inspire others and inviting guest speakers who can act as role models • Coaches can identify champions/fast climbers within the group, who can support their work in motivating other participants, acting as role models, and providing technical experience on specific livelihoods • Coaches should look out for participants who do not seem engaged or vocal in the group meetings, as they may be suffering from an unseen issue. Probing skills are key to see whether their needs are being met by the sessions • Larger groups can be harder to coordinate, so establishing upfront rules for respectful coexistence is beneficial. Sessions should be scheduled in advance, allowing participants to make sufficient arrangements to attend • If possible, the programme should integrate individual sessions/household visits at least in key programme moments, such as during participants' profiling and when participants receive the asset transfer. These occasions generally benefit from a more individualised approach	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Coaches should leverage collective knowledge within the group and promote peer-to-peer exchange, encouraging participants to share success stories and how they have overcome challenges as a way to inspire others • Coaches can identify champions/fast climbers within the group who can support them in motivating other participants, acting as role models, and providing technical experience on specific livelihoods • Coaches should look out for participants who do not seem engaged or vocal in the group meetings, as they may be suffering from an unseen issue. Probing skills are key to see whether their needs are being met by the sessions • If possible, the programme should try to integrate individual sessions/household visits at least in key programme moments, such as during participants' profiling and when participants receive the asset transfer to invest in a productive activity. These occasions generally benefit from a more individualised approach	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • When planning the coaching curriculum, the programme should establish upfront which contents will be delivered through individual coaching and which will be delivered through group sessions • Avoid overlapping household visits with group sessions in the programme's timeline, since it can be overwhelming for coaches to manage both methods at the same time • Please check the recommendations for holding groups and individual coaching sessions in this document, since they will also apply here	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • This modality is suitable for well-resourced programmes with good availability of workforce and relatively lower caseloads • Coaches should receive proper training to avoid potential conflictive/abusive situations with household members (particularly around gender norms). Coaches should be properly identified with programme credentials when visiting households • The programme should try to integrate at least some collective spaces to foster peer exchange and strengthen participants' social capital

** The resource level indicates the level of financial and human resources that are generally required to implement that particular modality.*

2. Frequency of in-person contact with participants

Evidence: Evidence shows that as long as some form of coaching is regular and reliable, the benefits of coaching may be less sensitive to the frequency and intensity with which coaching is delivered (Zizzamia et al, 2023; Devereux et al, 2015). Moreover, frequent coaching but with poor structure seems to not generate significant impacts (Botea et al, 2021). Overall, quality and reliability seem to be more important than quantity.

Implementation implications: The coaching frequency can change throughout the programme and be more intensive at the beginning of the participant's journey and less intensive towards the end as long as coaching remains regular and reliable (not less than once a month). The programme can also choose to vary the coaching frequency depending on participants' needs and vulnerability.

Once a month	Every two weeks	Every week
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Implications: + Allow for higher caseloads and scale, especially if combined with coaching through group sessions + Lower implementation costs (smaller workforce needed) + Evidence shows that positive results can still be achieved even when participant-coach contact is not so frequent as long as coaching is regular and reliable – Harder to build trust and proximity with participants, particularly at the beginning of the programme, which can impact the results – Harder to monitor participants' progress and address issues "on time" – The breadth and depth of coaching topics is reduced since the number of sessions is likely to be lower compared to the other two modalities – Participants with severe psychosocial constraints to empowerment may need more regular psychosocial support to fully engage in other programme interventions	**Implications:** + Provides a good balance between frequent contact with participants and operational feasibility in government-led programmes + Many Graduation programmes have used this frequency as their standard approach and achieved significant positive outcomes + Can still work with relatively larger caseloads (50 to 100 people) if combined with group coaching – Resource constraint programmes with very large caseloads (above 100 people) may find it difficult to implement this frequency modality even if combined with group coaching – During labour-intensive seasons (eg.: harvesting season), participants may find it difficult to attend fortnight sessions, particularly if they have to move out of their villages to work for some time	**Implications:** + Allow for a great degree of contact between coaches and participants and facilitates the process of building trust and proximity between them + Allows for close monitoring of participants' progress and for timely course correction if needed + The breadth and depth of coaching topics is increased since the number of sessions is likely to be higher compared to the other two modalities – It's only feasible with relatively smaller caseloads (< 50), especially if coaching is delivered through individual household visits – Higher implementation costs (bigger workforce needed) – This frequency can be too intense for some programme participants, (eg.: single parents during school vacations; smallholders during harvesting season), particularly if maintained throughout the entire programme duration, leading to programme fatigue/absenteeism

Key + *pro* – *con*

Once a month	Every two weeks	Every week
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Recommendations if using this modality: • If possible, the coaching frequency should be higher than once a month at the beginning of the programme (to build trust and rapport with participants) and then gradually transition to once a month to accommodate programme resource restrictions if needed. Many programmes have chosen to reduce the frequency of support once the asset has been delivered to the participant • To maintain participants' engagement and motivation between in-person sessions, programmes should incorporate 'lighter' forms of contact, such as follow-up phone calls and messaging between sessions (see Coaches' Supporting Tools section) • Participants should perceive coaching as being regular and reliable (particularly when delivered at a lower frequency). Coaches should reassure participants about coaching continuity and minimise uncertainty by providing them with a clear timeline	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Coaches should leverage collective knowledge within the group and promote peer-to-peer exchange, encouraging participants to share success stories and how they have overcome challenges as a way to inspire others • Coaches can identify champions/fast climbers within the group, who can support their work in motivating other participants, acting as role models, and providing technical experience on specific livelihoods • Coaches should look out for participants who do not seem engaged or vocal in the group meetings, as they may be suffering from an unseen issue. Probing skills are key to see whether their needs are being met by the sessions • If possible, the programme should try to integrate individual sessions/household visits at least in key programme moments, such as during participants' profiling and when participants receive the asset transfer to invest in a productive activity. These occasions generally benefit from a more individualised approach	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • This modality is suitable for well-resourced programmes with good availability of workforce and relatively lower caseloads • A programme can opt to apply this high-intensity frequency at some moments of the coaching component (eg.: technical skills/vocational training) to align with providers' teaching structure, as well as to address topics that require more intensive and regular contact with participants • Programmes can aim to have this coaching frequency at the beginning to build trust and proximity with programme participants and then gradually decrease the frequency as participants progress. This can free up coaches' time so that they can take on new programme participants from subsequent cohorts, for example • This frequency can be too intensive for some programme participants, therefore, programmes should consider participants' profiles, use of time, and labour seasonality when planning the coaching timeline

3. Caseload (participants per coach)

Evidence: Recommended caseloads range widely from 40 to 50 (Kingsly and Bernagros 2019) and 40 to 120 households (Moqueet et al, 2019). When meeting in groups, coaches can effectively have higher caseloads with groups often having between 15 and 25 people (Sumanthiran and Roelen, 2023). High caseloads combined with inadequate programme design and supporting tools, unrealistic targets, and excessive administrative burden can lead to staff burnout and turnover (Moen 2016; Roelen et al. 2019). However, government-led Graduation programmes often operate with high caseloads due to budget and operational limitations and have to find innovative ways to distribute the workload.

Implementation implications: First-edition programmes can experiment with lower caseloads, to be able to test the approach, build the team's capacity, and adjust field logistics and operations. For subsequent cohorts, programmes can expand the caseload to be able to reach scale. Spreading the roles of coaching across individuals and partners is one option to address coaches' overburdening in programmes with higher caseloads. The use of technology for M&E processes can decrease coaches' administrative burden. Technology can also increase participants' proximity to the programme through alternative digital channels that are not strictly dependent on the coaches' physical presence.

More than 100	71 to 100	40 to 70	Less than 40
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Implications: + Allow for scale in programmes with limited human resources – This may lead to reduced attention to programme participants and superficial coaching services – If not well designed, can lead to staff burnout and high turnover – Few Graduation programmes are known to have caseloads of over 100 people	**Implications:** + Allow for scale in programmes with limited human resources + There have been quite a few cases of Graduation programmes with this caseload – This may lead to reduced attention to programme participants and superficial coaching services – If not well designed, can lead to staff burnout and high turnover	**Implications:** + Allow coaches to know participants well while also sustaining some level of scale + Most Graduation programmes have been implemented with caseloads of under 75 participants – Higher implementation costs (bigger workforce needed) – May not be feasible for underresourced government-led programmes	**Implications:** + Allow coaches to know participants very well and build relationships on a personal level + Allow for a personalised level of coaching and advice – High implementation costs (bigger workforce needed) – May not be feasible for government-led programmes, even if relatively well-resourced, since most public social programmes operate with higher caseloads than this – Few government-led programmes are known to have caseloads of less than 40 people

Key *+ pro* *– con*

More than 100	71 to 100	40 to 70	Less than 40
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Recommendations if using this modality: • Caseloads of over 100 participants normally require coaching to be delivered through group sessions • Due to time restrictions, coaches normally take on more basic tasks such as identifying families, acting as animators, and organising participants to receive additional training/coaching services provided by other partners • Programmes with high caseloads can benefit from the use of technology for M&E purposes to decrease the administrative burden on coaches • Technology can also be used to increase participants' proximity with the programme, since coaches have limited contact hours with participants. Messaging through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and phone or video calls are examples of alternative channels to engage with participants • Programmes with high caseloads can benefit from having partners that deliver complementary parts of coaching or dedicated staff that provide extra support for more vulnerable participants • Special attention should be given to the level of stress of coaches and if they are being given tasks and targets that are feasible	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Caseloads between 100 and 70 participants normally deliver most coaching sessions through groups, with some specific individual sessions • Coaches normally take on more basic tasks (such as identifying families, acting as animators, and organising participants to receive additional training/coaching services provided by other partners) and can eventually provide some general training for participants as well • Programmes with high caseloads can benefit from the use of technology for M&E purposes to decrease the administrative burden on coaches • Technology can also be used to increase participants' proximity with the programme since coaches have limited contact hours with participants. Messaging through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and phone or video calls are examples of alternative channels to engage with participants • Programmes with high caseloads can benefit from having partners that deliver complementary parts of coaching or dedicated staff that provide extra support for more vulnerable participants • Special attention should be given to the level of stress of coaches and if they are being given tasks and targets that are feasible	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Caseloads between 70 and 40 participants normally allow for a mix of group and individual sessions • Coaches have more time and can take on more complex tasks and provide training on different topics (life skills, entrepreneurship, financial education, nutrition, health, etc) decreasing the need to have different providers for the coaching component. Therefore, it is advisable to hire coaches with higher qualifications and provide adequate tools to support their work	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Caseloads under 40 participants normally allow for coaching to be delivered primarily through individual sessions • With this caseload, coaches can perform complex tasks and provide most elements of the coaching component (targeting, skills training, psychosocial support, linkage to complementary services, etc). Other partners can be hired to provide specific technical/vocational training on selected livelihoods. Therefore, it is advisable to hire coaches with higher qualifications and provide adequate tools to support their work

4. Staffing options

Evidence: the evidence shows a wide range of arrangements for staffing options, each one with pros and cons, with a preference for choosing coaches that are from or familiar with the communities targeted by the programme (Sumanthiran and Roelen, 2023; Moqueet et al, 2019). However, evidence also shows that if coaches' capacities are insufficient and coaching is delivered in an unstructured way, the coaching component may not add any positive impact to the programme, representing poor value for money (Botea et al, 2021).

Implementation implications: government-led programmes can benefit from using government community workers who are already integrated into the public structure increasing programme institutionalisation and potentially decreasing costs. Paid community workers can also be an option when government workers are not available. In government-led programmes, external coaches often have a more limited and/or transitory role (providing specific coaching activities for a determined period of time). Volunteer coaches generally present important limitations (lower commitment, fewer qualifications, limited availability) and their use should be carefully accessed.

Volunteer community coaches	Paid community coaches	Government coaches	External coaches (NGO, private)
Low resource level	**Low resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Implications:	**Implications:**	**Implications:**	**Implications:**
+ Lowest cost	+ Lower costs (generally coaches are paid a relatively low stipend)	+ More likely to have the qualifications needed	+ Generally have stronger educational and technical qualifications
+ Individuals who know well and care for the communities they are working with	+ Individuals who know well and care for the communities they are working with	+ If coaches are already working in the public social system, it reduces the burden on programmes to hire new people	+ Can provide more specialised coaching services and fill in the gaps that community and government coaches cannot
- Potential high turnover and low commitment	+ Payment has the potential to increase commitment, mitigate turnover, and attract individuals with more skills compared to volunteer coaches	+ Generally know the communities they are working with	- Normally represent higher costs
- Generally low-skilled individuals with limitations to provide good quality coaching	- Lack of qualifications can still be an issue compared to more professional coaches	+ Can be instrumental in strengthening the government's ownership of the programme since they are embedded in the public structure	- Not necessarily know the community well
- Potential bias when providing coaching services for people they know	- Potential bias when providing coaching services for people they know	- Often have other responsibilities that limit how much they can take on in the programme	- Can be a barrier to programme sustainability and/or government ownership
- There can be ethical implications of not remunerating the work of vulnerable individuals who are just a bit better off than programme participants	- Paying coaches without them becoming official government staff is often an administrative bottleneck that requires innovative solutions	- Sometimes the hiring processes can depend on governments' long bureaucratic procedures and result in programme delays	
	- Unclear what the long-term career prospect is for the coach: What happens to their job once all eligible people in their area have graduated?	- Requires strong champions and institutionalisation of the programme because if political commitment wains, coaches hired as official government staff can be re-assigned to other matters	

Key + *pro* - *con*

Volunteer community coaches	Paid community coaches	Government coaches	External coaches (NGO, private)
Low resource level	**Low resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Recommendations if using this modality: • Using volunteer community coaches should be the last resource since the cons generally surpass the pros. For programme quality, scale, and sustainability, other forms of coaching delivery should be considered • If using volunteers is the only alternative, programmes should leverage non-monetary incentives (e.g. career support for coaches) and consider performance-based monetary incentives for coaches • Volunteer coaches should have as few/least intensive responsibilities as possible and be engaged on a part-time basis, recognising the need to engage in income-generating work themselves	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Programmes should assess the skill level of community coaches and define tasks that are compatible with them. Community coaches can take on simpler tasks, such as identifying families, acting as animators, and organising participants to receive coaching and other services provided by other partners • Community coaches may lack important skills for providing adequate assistance to participants. Therefore, programmes should provide adequate supporting tools for them to perform their work (ToT on basic coaching skills, user-friendly coaching guidelines, and supporting tools that can ease their burden, including digital tools to facilitate training and data collection) • If the programme identifies potential risks of bias in service delivery, the programme can choose coaches that are from the same area as the participants, but not from the same community/village necessarily	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Government coaches can often work partially in other social programmes and have parallel responsibilities leaving little time for planning. The programme should, therefore, provide adequate supporting tools for them to perform their work (comprehensive ToT, user-friendly coaching guidelines, and supporting tools that can ease their burden, including digital tools to facilitate training and data collection) • Having coaches sit within the government allows them to enhance collaboration among (often siloed) government agencies and institutionalise the programme from the ground up	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Since they are normally more expensive, external coaches can provide specific parts of coaching that require higher qualifications (eg.: vocational and technical training, entrepreneurship training, intensive psychosocial counselling) and that community and government coaches may struggle to deliver • External coaches can be initially used to provide a benchmark for/build the capacity of community or government coaches and be gradually replaced once internal institutional capacities are strengthened • External coaches should work in coordination with the community and/or government to minimise programme disruption and issues related to not knowing communities well

5. Type of contact

Evidence: More organisations are incorporating digital tools to enhance coaching and M&E processes (Fundación Capital, Trickle Up, BOMA, Village Enterprises) (Sumanthiran and Roelen, 2023). Although there are not many studies on the adoption of technology in Graduation programmes, there is evidence that certain topics have been successfully delivered through digital tools positively changing participants' outcomes (Atanasio et al, 2019; Moen 2016). There are also documented case studies and empirical evidence on the use of messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp) to enhance the coaching component.

Implementation implications: Coaching through in-person meetings has been the cornerstone of Graduation programmes and is fundamental in building trust and engagement with participants. Therefore, some level of regular in-person contact (individual or in groups) should be mandatory, particularly at the beginning of the programme. Other types of contact should not entirely replace in-person contact, but can be used to complement it and/or gradually replace in-person contact towards the programme's end. Digital platforms are of particular use in providing alternative channels of contact between coaches and participants - e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger.

Asynchronous light-touch digital contact	Asynchronous comprehensive digital contact	Synchronous digital contact	In-person contact
Low resource level	**High resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
This entails any coaching content that is delivered digitally, asynchronously (when the participant doesn't need to be online at the same time as the trainer) and is light-touch (short 'pills' of information). Some examples include sending SMSs, sharing text messages, voice notes, short videos, and flyers through Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp	This entails any coaching content that is delivered digitally and asynchronously (when the participant doesn't need to be online at the same time as the trainer) and is comprehensive (provides in-depth information for programme participants). Some examples include e-learning platforms and training apps that can be accessed by participants on their own devices at any time	This entails any coaching content that is delivered digitally and synchronously (when the participant needs to be online at the same time as the trainer). Some examples include phone calls and video calls	This entails any coaching contact that is delivered through in-person meetings between coaches and participants using individual or group sessions



Asynchronous light-touch digital contact	Asynchronous comprehensive digital contact	Synchronous digital contact	In-person contact
Low resource level	**High resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Implications:	**Implications:**	**Implications:**	**Implications:**
+ They are relatively easy and cheap to develop and can reach many people at once	+ Can support the work of coaches by covering core/standard contents and allowing teams to spend more time on providing personalised advice to programme participants	+ Can provide a good level of contact and interaction between coaches and participants while reducing logistical costs (such as transportation fees for coaches and participants) if compared to in-person sessions	+ Provides the highest level of proximity between coaches and participants allowing them to know each other mutually and build trust, which is a fundamental element of Graduation programmes
+ Complement/reinforce the content that is delivered in in-person meetings or gradually replace in-person contact towards the programme's end to provide a smoother transition for participants	+ Can take advantage of audiovisual features that are particularly suitable for people with low literacy levels (animations, interactive activities, story-telling)	+ Participants and coaches can join and interact from their homes/preferred space	+ The coach can note aspects of participants' attitudes, behaviours and overall condition that are harder to observe through digital means
+ Can take advantage of audiovisual features that are particularly suitable for people with low literacy levels (audio bites, videos, pictures)	+ Provides some training standardisation and decreases the dependency on coaches' abilities to deliver core/ standard contents	+ A good alternative to replace in-person meetings in occasions of mobility restrictions (road blockages, floods, etc)	+ Participants don't need to have access to cellphones/smartphones, internet connectivity or have some level of digital literacy
− Requires internet connectivity and access to cellphone/smartphone	+ Can integrate monitoring features to collect and analyse data	+ Reduces any need for participants to find child/elder care to attend meetings	+ Has been the most traditional/proven way of delivering coaching content in Graduation programmes
− Requires some level of digital literacy from participants	− Requires internet connectivity (unless tools are designed to work offline) and access to smartphone, tablet, or computer	− Requires internet connectivity (in the case of calls/video calls) and access to cellphone/smartphone	− Generally represents higher costs for the programme and participants (transportation, food, childcare services, etc)
− The depth of content shared through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or SMSs is limited and does not replace more robust training methodologies	− Requires some level of digital literacy from participants	− Requires some level of digital literacy (except from traditional phone calls)	− Can be easily disrupted in the case of external shocks (natural emergencies, political turmoil, etc)
	− The development can represent high upfront costs and the return on investment depends on the programme's scale	− Calls/video calls are not adequate for larger groups	− Can be a barrier to entry for time-poor households

Key + *pro* − *con*

Asynchronous light-touch digital contact	Asynchronous comprehensive digital contact	Synchronous digital contact	In-person contact
Low resource level	**High resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
Recommendations if using this modality: • Content shared through SMS, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp should be short and aligned with the coaching curriculum (it should complement the mainstream training and not replace it) • When selecting the delivery channel, make sure to pick the platform that is more popular within the target population (it may be different from the staff's personal preferences) • If sharing files such as pictures and videos be sure that they are lightweight • Programmes may consider giving small grants for participants to buy air time/ data for their devices	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Programmes should consider this modality if they are aiming for scale, since upfront development costs can be high. Once a certain scale is reached, the cost per participant decreases gradually • Digital tools should provide a user-friendly experience for programme participants (particularly considering their level of digital literacy). A way of doing that is by applying a human-centred design and iterating with participants along the process • The digital tools should be accessible in local languages, not just the country's working language • Programmes may consider giving small grants for participants to buy air time/ data for their devices	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • This modality can be used to provide follow-up between in-person sessions, keep participants motivated, and complement content provided during in-person sessions • In better-connected areas, the programme may consider hosting video calls for training purposes using established platforms (WhatsApp, Google Meets, etc). While in poorly-connected areas, simple phone calls can be used to follow up on participants' progress and keep them engaged • Programmes may consider giving small grants for participants to buy air time/data for their devices, especially if video calls will be used (they are data-intensive)	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Graduation programmes should always integrate some level of regular in-person contact (individual or in groups), particularly at the beginning of the programme given the importance of building trust and engagement with participants • Holding in-person meetings requires specific skills from coaches (eg.: respectful and empathetic communication, ability to listen, observation skills, etc). Teams should receive adequate training before going to the field • In-person coaching can also benefit from using technology to support coaches in delivering key/standard messages (eg.: using videos or digital training tools) allowing them to focus more on providing personalised assistance to participants

6. Coaching supporting tools

Evidence: most Graduation programmes use some form of paper-based supporting tool for coaches and participants (manuals, workbooks). However, more organisations are incorporating digital tools to enhance coaching and M&E processes (Fundación Capital, Trickle Up, BOMA, Village Enterprises) (Sumanthiran and Roelen, 2023). Although there are not many studies on the adoption of technology in Graduation programmes, there is evidence that certain topics have been successfully delivered through digital tools positively changing participants' outcomes (Atanasio et al, 2019; Moen 2016). There are also documented case studies and empirical evidence on the use of messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp) to enhance the coaching component.

Implementation implications: all programmes should at least have manuals/ coaching guidelines for programme staff providing overall guidance on how to work with participants, as well as specific guidance on each coaching session. This increases the chances of uniform programme delivery and higher-quality coaching services. Large-scale implementations can benefit from having digital training tools for Training of Trainers (ToT). Programmes that want to incorporate digital tools to enhance coaching delivery can choose from a wide range, from cheaper solutions, such as content shared through WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger or display of short videos during sessions, to more comprehensive and expensive solutions such as training apps and e-learning tools.



Paper-based training tools for coaches and participants	Digital training tools for coaches	Digital training/coaching tools for participants
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**
Includes manuals for coaches, flipcharts, and workbooks for participants, among others.	Programmes can use e-learning platforms to deliver ToT. Different e-learning platforms offer the basic structure to develop digital training without the need of being/hiring a developer. These platforms offer different features such as the possibility of including quizzes, tests, open forums, and different formats of content (videos, infographics, presentations) and generally have M&E tools embedded.	There is a wide range of options that programmes can choose from, ranging from cheaper solutions, such as content shared through WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, or display of short videos during sessions, to more comprehensive and expensive solutions, such as training apps and e-learning tools.
Implications: + Low-cost and easy-to-develop + Don't require access to the Internet or digital devices + Most participants and coaches will be used to the format – If heavily reliant on texts, can be challenging for individuals with low literacy levels – Harder to monitor their usage and users progress – Distribution logistics can be challenging in massive implementations – Youth in some contexts may find paper-based tools not sufficiently engaging	**Implications:** + Can facilitate scale-ups, reducing the frequency and length of in-person ToT + Coaches can have access to training materials and refresher training at any time + Digital training platforms can provide better monitoring of coaches' learning progress and performance – Require access to a digital device and may require access to the Internet – The development can represent higher upfront costs and a moderate level of digital literacy (no need to be a developer) – Coaches with low digital literacy may struggle at first and may need training/shadowing	**Implications:** + Allow for a great degree of contact between coaches and participants and facilitates the process of building trust and proximity between them + Allows for close monitoring of participants' progress and for timely course correction if needed + The breadth and depth of coaching topics is increased since the number of sessions is likely to be higher compared to the other two modalities + Can take advantage of audiovisual features that are particularly suitable for people with low literacy levels (animations, interactive activities, story-telling) + Provides some training standardisation and decreases the dependency on coaches' abilities to deliver core/standard contents + Can integrate monitoring features to collect and analyse data – Requires internet connectivity (unless tools are designed to work offline) and access to a digital device if not provided by the programme itself – Requires some level of digital literacy (unless used during in-person sessions in which coaches are present to support usage) – The development can represent high upfront costs and the return on investment depends on the programme's scale

Key + *pro* – *con*

Paper-based training tools for coaches and participants	Digital training tools for coaches	Digital training/coaching tools for participants
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**Intermediate resource level**
Recommendations if using this modality: • Programmes should at least have manuals/ coaching guidelines for programme staff providing overall guidance on how to work with participants and specific guidance on each coaching session. This increases the chances of uniform programme delivery and higher-quality coaching services • When designing printed material for programme participants, programmes should take into consideration participants' literacy level. If they are low on average, refrain from using too much text and instead make use of carefully designed pictures, infographics, and photos to deliver the information	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Some level of in-person training is advisable even if e-learning tools are used as the basis for ToT. This allows coaches to interact among themselves, share experiences, and instructors to know coaches better and provide personalised guidance on specific matters • E-learning tools can incorporate interactive features such as discussion forums with peers, learning activities that involve role-playing, and live sessions with instructors to bring a human touch to the process • One of the main advantages of using e-learning tools is the possibility to incorporate monitoring features to track learning progress and performance. Programme coordinators can provide extra support for coaches whose learning performance is lagging behind	**Recommendations if using this modality:** • Digital tools can be used either autonomously and asynchronously by participants on their own devices (eg.: WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, YouTube or self-guided digital training in an app) or by coaches, during in-person sessions (video displays, digital training apps as support for coaching, etc). There are several ways of incorporating technology to support coaching depending on the programme's budget, structure, curriculum etc. • Programmes may consider giving small grants for participants to buy air time/data for their devices

7. Coaching tasks

Evidence: Evidence shows that coaches' tasks and roles can vary widely, from providing basic follow-up advice in some programmes to providing very tailored assistance in others (Sumanthiran and Roelen, 2023). The level of tasks is influenced by programme resources, coaches' profile/qualifications, and programme structure (coaching provided by one or multiple actors).

Implementation implications: In resource-constrained settings, in which coaches often have low qualifications and receive little compensation, they should be tasked with basic activities that are aligned with their capacities, such as performing essential tasks for programme operation and serving as linkages between participants and other programme components that are provided by partners. Often, they also have to deliver some training themselves, even if lacking the proper skills to do so. Therefore providing adequate ToT and supporting tools (manuals, digitised training content, etc.) is fundamental to guaranteeing a minimum standard of quality. In better-resourced settings, coaches can take on more responsibilities and provide comprehensive support, decreasing the need for external partners to fill the gaps. In this case, coaches need to have specific qualifications and be paid accordingly.

Basic level tasks	Intermediate level tasks	Advanced level tasks
Low resource level	**Intermediate resource level**	**High resource level**
• Support participants' identification and profiling • Provide follow-up advice after training provided by another partner • Link/refer participants to complementary services and programmes • Collect monitoring data throughout the implementation • Regular meetings with supervisor(s) to discuss participant progress and challenges • Regular meetings with other coaches to discuss lessons learned, effective approaches, etc.	All the previous activities plus: • Provide standardised training (eg.: life skills, entrepreneurship skills, nutrition, etc) • Provide linkages to local markets • Coordinate and manage relationships with complementary service providers • Provide different levels of support to participants based on their needs (able to assess and support both fast and slow climbers)	All the previous activities plus: • Provide tailored advice for participants (on livelihood development, personal development, etc.) • Provide psychosocial support • Engage with family members and community to shift social/gender norms • Seek out additional providers to crowd into the programme

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For further information, please contact:

- Stephanie Brockerhoff (stephanie.brockerhoff@brac.net)
- Carolina de Miranda (carol.miranda@brac.bet)