

REGRADE RESILIENCE + GRADUATION + EVIDENCE

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LEARNING BRIEF: COACHING & MENTORING



EXPERIENCES FROM CONCERN'S REGRADE PROGRAMME IN ETHIOPIA

The REGRADE programme (2017–2022) implemented by Concern Worldwide in Ethiopia was designed to build livelihood security and improve nutritional outcomes of people living in extreme poverty. It builds on top of the national Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and adopts a Graduation Approach, a big-push poverty intervention that consists of four core pillars: social protection, livelihood promotion, financial inclusion and social empowerment.

The programme targeted 11,660 households¹ / 59,185 people who reside, or whose farming plots are located in 20 Community Micro-Watersheds (CMWs) in South Wollo and Wolaita Zone. The targeted CMWs are considered the most vulnerable to disasters such as soil erosion leading to reduction in the productivity of crops and the persistence of malnutrition.



A core component of the Graduation Approach is coaching – an activity which supports participants to meet their goals and encourages positive behaviour change. Coaching is provided by front line staff referred to as Case Managers or Case Workers. It is widely seen to be the ‘x-factor’ of Graduation programmes and instrumental to programme success and sustainability of outcomes.²

Complementing existing livelihood activities with coaching is a new approach for Concern in Ethiopia. Coaches, known locally as Household Caseworkers (HCW) were recruited from the programme intervention area and living close to the target households thereby ensuring greater embeddedness within local communities and strong linkages to local governments. Fifty-four HCWs were recruited under the REGRADE programme in total – 25 (18 female) with four supervisors (3 females) in South Wollo Zone and 29 (11 female) in Wolaita Zone. Each HCW is responsible for coaching up to 50 households each through both individual and group coaching methods.



HCWs deliver technical and life skills training to participating households, offer guidance on specific problems they face and facilitate access to basic services such as health care, education and psychosocial support. The set of activities are all designed to build the confidence of households and help families stay on track towards meeting pre-defined graduation criteria.

HCWs mentoring farmers at the farmer's homes at Ambo CMW

Photos: Concern Worldwide, Feb 2021

- 1 5,634 households were targeted with a comprehensive Graduation package and 6,026 households were reached through wider community activities including Natural Resource Management, Promotion of Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, Maternal, Infant and Young Child Feeding (MIYCF), Family Planning and capacity building of Cooperatives.
- 2 For more information on the role of coaching within Concern's Graduation Programmes see Concern Worldwide (2021) Concern's Experience and Learning from the Graduation Approach in Knowledge Matters, Concern Worldwide: Dublin <https://www.concern.net/insights/knowledge-matters-graduation-approach-2021>

The job description of HCWs includes:

- Assisting households to identify the reasons why they are living in poverty and help them to plan and find solutions to move out of poverty.
- Facilitating the planning and proper implementation of income generating activities by participating households to increase their asset ownership and the returns on these assets.
- Promoting gender equality within homes and the community.
- Providing advisory services to improve the technical and business skills of participating households (relating to income generating activities) and improve market linkages.
- Providing support and sharing learning with participating households to facilitate their journey.
- Linking participating households to existing service providers (health, education, psychological) and opportunities.
- Collecting, documenting and sharing necessary monitoring data from participating households.

HOUSEHOLD VISITS

HCWs visit participating households twice a month (once individually and once in a group setting). HCWs will also sometimes allot additional time to support households who are making slower progress and may need more frequent support to bring them to the position of their counterparts. Visits last up to an hour each time.

Prior to the visit

Each HCW has a target to visit five households per day, depending on the proximity of households. Prior to their visit, the HCW will communicate with the household and agree the day, time and location of visit. They will also provide an overview of the topics to be discussed. On the visit, the HCWs pass on messages about nine indicators that are targeted for Graduation and are covered within a month in a two-day visit.

During the visit

Following greetings, HCWs encourage households to begin the conversation based on what is most relevant for the household at that time. HCWs also ask about livelihood activities and share relevant messages and the household members can ask questions for clarification or guidance. Frequently discussed topics include:

- Performance of household's economic activities and the opportunities to diversify by engaging in different *on-farm* and *off-farm* activities.
- Saving activities in formal and informal structures and the way households use cash income obtained through grants and loans, and how to reduce unnecessary expenditures.
- Participation of women and men in livelihood activities and household decision-making including access and control over resources.
- Personal hygiene and sanitation including the use of pit latrine and household cleanliness
- Dietary diversity through promoting nutrition sensitive agriculture such as backyard gardening for vegetable production, the use of livestock produce and intentionally diversifying meals for family members.
- Family planning and how to access the formal health services, and
- School attendance and wellbeing of children.

HCWs also check on the execution of the plans from previous discussions at every subsequent meeting.

Observation

HCWs also observe conditions in the house, backyard and farm plots as well as household behaviours. This practice often leads to further discussion and guidance. Aspects often observed include:

House

- The division of labour among household members
- House management, including the separation of human and livestock living spaces.
- Kitchen management, including the cleanliness of household utensils.
- Childcare.

- Personal hygiene.
- Energy source and the use of efficient fuel stove.
- A review of saving and credit passbooks and income and expenditure books to see how well households are recording and responding to information.

Backyard

- Cleanliness of the compound.
- Vegetables and fodder production.
- The status of compost making.
- The disposal of waste
- Availability and use of dry pit latrine and hand washing facility.
- Poultry feeding and management (in collaboration with the Development Agents – DAs and Health Extension Workers – HEWs).

Farm plots

- Condition of farmland preparation.
- Condition of crops for enhanced production.
- Practice of crop rotation, and the utilization of compost.
- Soil and water conservation practices.
- Weeding practices.
- Pest infestation (any).
- Management and use of small ruminants.

Guidance

HCWs also work with participating households, and provide guidance, on several key areas:

Livelihood improvement and diversification

- Alternative livelihood options. The ways in which households can improve outputs from their on-farm and off-farm livelihood activities.
- How to best market outputs.
- Ways in which to enhance production.
- How to identify viable economic activities.
- How to prepare business plans.
- Saving practices.
- How to access credit services through RuSACCOs³ and how financial products work i.e. loan repayment process.

Gender equality

- The need and the importance of Interdependence of men and women with supportive division of roles
- The importance of mutual decision making on issues that affect their lives and livelihoods
- The need for equal access to and control over resources
- Motivating women to be engaged in income-generating activities (IGAs) as a means for economic empowerment

- Creating equal opportunities for boys and girls, avoiding early marriage of boys and girls
- The importance of active participation of women in the society for power transformation in order to bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes in women and men

School attendance of children

HCWs advise households on the importance of education to the family, community and society. They emphasise the need to allocate financial resources for educational materials (stationery, uniform) and to encourage children to study. They also discuss the need for proper feeding of students, avoiding early marriage and sending children to school at the proper age.

Family planning

In collaboration with the HEWs, HCWs advise spouses on the benefits of family planning, the importance of having reasonable time intervals between births (the recommended interval is 2–5 years), the use of contraceptive methods and how to access these.

Other

Other guidance provided by HCWs to households includes conflict resolution; works required by the community for disaster risk reduction (DRR), how to access the complaints response mechanism (CRM) messages on the risks of HIV and AIDS and, more recently, COVID-19 prevention and control methods.

IMPLEMENTATION

Concern Worldwide works in partnership with government structures (Development Agents – DAs, Cooperative Promoters and Health Extension Workers – HEWs) as well as Kebele Administration on the implementation of coaching activities.

Kebele Administration

The services provided by the HCWs are also supported by the respective Kebele Administration offices. The areas of support and joint actions include:

- Community mobilization for public works such as pit latrine construction, soil and water conservation.
- Targeting of participating households.
- Loan distribution and repayment.
- Household awareness raising on saving during consumption support.
- Following up of households income-generating activities.
- Following up on Disaster Risk Reduction interventions.

The Kebele Administration Offices also disseminate relevant information to the entire community for ensuring the security and safety of the working environment, specifically with regards public works and ensuring that they are executed in a timely and efficient fashion.

Development Agents

HCWs work with DAs from the Office of Agriculture on a range of issues and receive technical guidance on various aspects including specific agricultural techniques. Aspects include:

- Yield increasing techniques for crop production and livestock management,
- Selection of livestock for asset transfers,
- Livestock management,
- Compost preparation techniques,
- Backyard gardening vegetable production,
- Pest management,
- Soil and Water Conservation activities.

DAs also provide technical trainings directly to households on different subjects which are beyond the responsibility or capacity of the HCWs. Whilst HCWs also provide trainings to DAs on the mission of Concern Worldwide and REGRADE to motivate them to working collaboratively towards a common goal.

Health Extension Workers

The HCWs work with the HEWs of the Office of the Health on different health related services. They work collaboratively on the dissemination of messages around:

- Family planning, and methods of contraceptives use,
- Use of the immunization services to children and pregnant women,
- Promoting on hygiene and sanitation,
- Improving infant and young child feeding (disseminating key messages on breastfeeding and food preparation for children)
- Health status of Pregnant and Lactating Mothers.
- Health insurance services,
- HIV and AIDS messages
- Prevention of the COVID-19 virus.

Joint action in practice

HCW and supervisors are responsible for initiating meetings between stakeholders. The Kebele Manager or Administrator is then responsible for organising meetings between HCWs and DAs, HEWs or Coop Promoters – and with individual farmers where necessary.

Additionally, individual role holders (HCWs, DAs, HEWs, Coop Promoters) can organise bilateral meetings as and when activities require. DAs and HEWs normally have sufficient time to share information and for joint activities unless they are engaged in other urgent activities.

There were a few challenges to working with DAs and HEWs in particular due to some role holders having low technical proficiency as well as large workloads, which limited their time for engagement. Finally, high turnover of the DAs and HEWs in programme areas led to poor institutional memory and lack of knowledge about the role of the programme.

OBSERVED CHANGES

Programme participants report that they do their best to take on board the guidance and advice provided by HCWs. HCWs have observed several changes in household behaviour as a result of advice given through coaching:

- Married women have re-joined school.
- Parents are sending school aged children to the school,
- Both men and women are engaging jointly in IGAs.
- Households are using the loan received effectively and efficiently – on the assets they had previously identified.
- Households are saving regularly in community-based savings groups or at RuSACCOs.
- Communities are actively seeking health services.
- Households have improved housing conditions.
- Household members (particularly spouses) appear to have more harmonious relationships.
- Male participants are engaging more in duties traditionally identified as being the responsibility of women, for example washing of baby clothes.

Additionally, HCWs report that participating households are actively seeking their guidance and advice on other issues, which suggests that strong and trusting relationships have been built.

Whilst it is not possible to attribute these changes to the coaching element of the programme alone, it is likely that they have played a significant role.