

Enabling Sustainable Graduation Out of Poverty for the Extreme Poor in Malawi

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Concern Worldwide’s organisational focus on extreme poverty recognises the multi-dimensionality of extreme poverty characterised by the lack of basic assets and the low return on these assets, inequality, and risk and vulnerability. *How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty*¹ focuses our work on the causes, maintainers and obstacles that prevent people from escaping extreme poverty, and seeks to address them.

In order to address these challenges, Concern developed a modified Graduation Model, first developed by BRAC in Bangladesh². The graduation approach utilises a multi-sectoral series of interventions (comprehensive targeting followed by consumption support in the form of cash transfers, skills training and coaching, saving and financial access, and asset transfers) to support a pathway out of extreme poverty³.

At A Glance

Programme Title: Enabling Sustainable Graduation out of Poverty for the Extreme Poor in Malawi

Programme Objectives: To increase resilience to climate change and reduce inequality for extreme poor and poor households in Nsanje and Mangochi.

Approach: The programme adopts a graduation approach; an integrated package of support designed to not only move people above a certain wealth threshold but also to facilitate a sustainable exit from extreme poverty. It also aims to address broader community problems through an enabling environment.

Target Group: Extreme poor and poor households with labour capacity. In addition, Cohort 1 targeted as many Social Cash Transfer (SCT) beneficiaries as possible. Cohort 2 and 3 include ‘marital’ or ‘couple’ households in line with the accompanying research project.

Number of Direct Targeted Beneficiaries: 8,000 households in total (40,000 total direct beneficiaries). 2,000 as graduation households and 6,000 in the enabling environment.

Programme Duration & Location: 2017-2021 - Mangochi (TA Katuli), Nsanje (TAs Chimombo, Makoko, Ndamera and Ngabu)

¹ How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty, Concern Worldwide, Updated 2022

² CGAP (2014) From Extreme Poverty to Sustainable Livelihoods. A Technical Guide to the Graduation Approach.

³ BRAC (2015) PROPEL Toolkit. An Implementation Guide to the Ultra-Poor Graduation Approach.

Concern's Graduation Programme in Malawi

Comprehensive targeting; The programme targeted households in Mangochi and Nsanje that were in the extreme poor and poor category. The programme planned to reach 2,000 households with the graduation component by 2021.

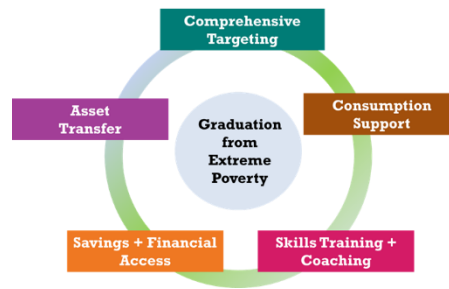
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Skills Training and Coaching; Coaching and mentoring is one of the core components of the graduation programme and was conducted by Concern employed case workers/field monitors. This was done through bimonthly visits for each of the households. Skills trainings focused on enhancing human capital and includes providing access to practical, short, hands-on trainings which included Business Skills trainings (for graduation households only) and Gender Transformative/Umodzi trainings (for treatment 3 households of the households that got the graduation component).

Savings and Financial Access; All graduation households were members of village, savings and loans groups. Graduation households chose if they wanted to join already existing groups, continue with their old groups, if they were already members of VSL groups and also if they wanted to be members of VSL groups with purely graduation households as members or groups that had both graduation households and other community members. Concern worked closely with village agents, who were trained by Concern in VSL methodology, providing capacity for building up their VSL groups.

Capital Transfer; All cohort 1, cohort 2 and cohort 3 graduation households were trained on the 17 point Business Skills Training model. This is a Business Skills Training (BST) model that is specially tailored for those that cannot read and write, it is an interactive model that uses pictures and illustrations to impart knowledge to programme participants on how to run a business.

Transforming gender and power relations (Umodzi) – Concern facilitated monthly gender-transformative dialogue sessions with the third treatment arm of cohort 3 beneficiaries that lasted for a year, where the Graduation recipient is a female but the couple benefits from the gender transformative workshops as part of the Randomized Control Trial impact evaluation led by Trinity College Dublin. The training aims to provoke positive social norm change within households to ensure that women and men benefit equally from the Graduation Programme, that any adverse effects that the programme may have on women's safety and/or household dynamics are minimised, and to promote positive relationships between women and men to benefit all members of the household and community.



Community “enabling environment” Activities

The programme also worked with the wider community, as well as with the cohort 1, cohort 2 and cohort 3 graduation households, to reduce their vulnerability to the impact of climate change and locally identified hazards by promoting Climate Smart Agriculture and enabling communities to access savings and credit and develop their livelihoods. During the implementation of the activities below, COVID-19 prevention measures were observed.

- Health and nutrition promotion and hygiene promotion
- Facilitating access to savings and loans services at the community level
- Training for field-led extension services/lead farmer
- Promotion of Conservation Agriculture (CA) through demonstration plots and field days
- Promotion of access to inputs through non-subsidised seed fairs and mobilization of private agro-dealers
- Training of community animal health workers
- Agroforestry trainings
- Cooperative member education training and cooperative registration
- Support for local structures eg Village Development Committees and Area Development Committees
- Disaster risk reduction and management
- Stakeholder capacity building and engagement
- Improving knowledge, attitudes and practices towards those living with or affected by HIV and AIDS to reduce stigma through partnership with 2 national Non- Governmental Organisations; Community Initiative for Self-Reliance (CISER) in Mangochi and Friends of AIDS Support Trust (FAST) in Nsanje
- Increasing influence on take-up of climate-smart agricultural technologies at district and national level through partnership with the Climate Smart Agriculture Civil Society Network (CISANET) that focused on CSA policy and advocacy at the district and national levels.

Research Component

Concern Malawi and Trinity Impact Evaluation (TIME) Unit at Trinity College Dublin are undertaking comprehensive research to estimate the impact of the graduation interventions on gender empowerment and ultimately household welfare as well as whether a gender component enhances the programme outcomes. The results from the research will contribute to on-going discussions on Social Protection in Malawi, while at a global level this will be the first study in the world to examine the gender dynamics of the graduation model. The results will therefore inform a variety of approaches, including those on cash transfers, the graduation process and approaches to addressing inequality.

How has the Graduation Programme Contributed to the Development of the *Raising Assets and Incomes for a Sustainable Environment in Malawi (RAISE)* Programme?

The RAISE programme aims to improve the food and nutrition security for vulnerable households in Chikwawa, Mwanza, Neno and Nsanje districts. The programme seeks to enhance households' and communities' resilience to food shocks associated with chronic and acute food insecure populations. The European Union (EU) and Irish Aid fund the RAISE programme.

The programme works with 26,796 Social Cash Transfer beneficiaries to adopt innovative coping mechanisms, create alternative sources of income, and increase access to nutritious diets. The programme's holistic approach will work with official and community stakeholders to develop and improve effective resilience initiatives and mechanisms at national, regional and community level. With learning from the couple gender transformative component in the RCT, the RAISE programme will work with the entire community through community gender transformative sessions to promote equality and to empower women to take an active role in mitigating against food crises.

Similarities between the RAISE Programme and the Previous Graduation Programme

The RAISE programme adopted a similar approach to the previous graduation programme where there were 2 groups of households; the graduation package households and the resilience package households (previously known as the enabling environment households). The RAISE programme also adopted some components of a recent project implemented by Concern, with funding from the EU known as ProAct.

	Similarities with previous graduation programme	Dropped from the previous graduation programmes	New components in the RAISE programme
Graduation package households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive targeting Consumption support Skills training and coaching Savings and financial access Asset transfer Umodzi gender transformative sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manual transfers for consumption support and capital transfer Research component 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive targeting using UBR data and district social cash transfer lists E-payments for the consumption support and capital transfers Consumption support amount changed to MK12,500.00 per month
Resilience package households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement of local partners Health, nutrition and hygiene promotion Village Savings and Loans Promotion of climate, smart agriculture, demonstration plots and field days through the lead farmer approach Non-subsidised input fairs Support for CAHWs Agroforestry trainings Cooperative member education training and cooperative registration Support for local structures Disaster risk reduction and management Stakeholder capacity building and engagement Improving knowledge, attitudes and practices towards those living with or affected by HIV and AIDS to reduce stigma 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult literacy Community gender transformative sessions Promotion of alternative fertilisers Promotion of nutritious value chains BST in VSL groups