

## Introduction

Concern Worldwide (Concern) has adopted a graduation approach<sup>i</sup> in a number of countries since 2008 (Bangladesh, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia), as a means of sustainably addressing extreme poverty at the household level.

Concern's model of graduation is an integrated package of support designed to bring about improved returns on new and existing assets, address inequality and reduce risk and vulnerability to support a pathway out of poverty for the extreme poor. The model consists of a number of core components: targeting to ensure that the extreme poor are identified as participants; provision of income support; provision of technical and business skills training; regular coaching and mentoring; facilitating access to basic services; facilitating access to financial services and promoting routine savings and a capital/asset transfer.

## Background

Between 2012 and 2016, Concern Worldwide implemented graduation programmes in Burundi and Rwanda<sup>ii</sup> which had an operational research component led by the Centre for Social Protection at the UK's Institute of Development Studies. Research in Rwanda was designed to assess changes in key indicators over time and the sustainability of these changes, whilst research in Burundi was designed to look at whether certain elements (components) of the graduation programme are more important than others – in particular to look at the effectiveness of the coaching component; often seen as the 'x-factor' that makes the difference between success and failure.

Following this research, several discrete topics were identified as requiring further investigation. The current research programme in Burundi and Rwanda; a two-year programme of work, is designed to build on this previous research<sup>iii</sup>.

## Current Research Programme

The current research programme is made up of three individual projects (as set out below).

### 1. Understanding graduation trajectories and the effect of political economy on outcomes

Qualitative and quantitative findings from the previous research in Burundi and Rwanda revealed that participating households followed divergent trajectories. Almost all participants improved their wellbeing on a range of outcome indicators during the project period, especially whilst receiving consumption support, and the majority continued to improve even after the programme ended, or at least maintained their gains. However, some households displayed a downturn after they stopped receiving support – some or all of their gains were lost. Understanding why this happened is important for two reasons: because graduation out of extreme poverty is only meaningful if it is sustainable; and because it implies that some households might need more tailored support, to strengthen their resilience against future livelihood shocks and stresses.

Building on quantitative analysis already undertaken<sup>iv</sup>, qualitative fieldwork will be conducted with case study households. In Rwanda, households will be selected based on four different trajectories – 'improvers', 'decliners', 'dropping out' and 'late improvers' – whilst in Burundi, households will be selected based on their inclusion in previous qualitative research thereby building on the longitudinal data available. Fieldwork will also be conducted with programme staff and other observers, to identify the enabling and constraining factors that allowed some participants to thrive whilst others struggled.

In both Burundi and Rwanda, political economy also played a significant role in affecting the design, delivery and impacts of Concern's graduation programmes. Political economy therefore, can be considered a key part of the set of enabling and constraining factors and will be integrated into analysis as such.

The political economy itself will be assessed on the basis of a review of relevant literature and interviews with key stakeholders to locate the two graduation programmes within the prevailing political context, and to trace how the programmes aligned with government thinking and policies during this period.

### 2. Further examination of the role of coaching and support in achieving positive and sustainable impact

The evaluation of the graduation programme in Burundi highlighted the positive effects of messaging on participants and non-participants<sup>v</sup>. This programme aims to unpack these positive effects by considering what elements of messaging are most important for positive change and how they can be delivered in a feasible and most effective manner.

Participatory fieldwork with programme participants will explore the elements of messaging and their role in achieving change; i.e. the message itself, the frequency with which it is repeated, the extent to which it is tailored to personal situations, the combination of messaging with psychosocial support, or the level of respect and dignity with which the message is delivered.

Conversational interviews with case managers and supervisors will explore their perceptions of the role of messaging but also assess how they perceive they can best implement their jobs *vis-à-vis* caseloads, training, remuneration, among others. As programmes in Burundi and Rwanda operate different case management models, there will be scope for cross-country comparison here.

### 3. Investigating the effect of graduation programmes on individuals within the household: intra-household dynamics and distribution of activities across individual household members

Graduation programmes are targeted at the household, and assume that all members of the household benefit from its positive effects. Indeed, the majority of evidence reflects the situation of the household as a whole with limited consideration of how participation in graduation model programmes affects individual members, including women and children.

Findings from evaluations of the graduation programmes in Burundi and Rwanda pointed to encouraging effects for women and children. In Burundi, the programme was found to lead to shifts in control over income away from 'men only' towards joint decision-making, and shifts in decisions about child-rearing away from 'women only' towards joint decision-making. Children were more likely to go to school and to have more and more diverse meals. Women also reported that case managers played a supportive role in resolving disputes that occurred with their partners during the programme period. In Rwanda, female programme participants were more likely to participate in community meetings, and many reported that they felt more respected in their communities.

This research aims to shed further light on the interaction between graduation programme participation, intra-household dynamics and women's empowerment. Participatory research with programme participants will investigate the distribution of paid work and unpaid (care) work tasks and responsibilities (and time spent on those) across household members, and whether this has changed since programme participation. Discussions with both women and men will also assess empowerment from perspectives of psychosocial wellbeing, negotiation and bargaining power within the household, and the extent to which the programme changed personal relationships within the household.

This study will employ conversational and participatory techniques for data collection. The sample will include current programme participants in Burundi and Rwanda respectively. It will also include programme staff at different levels of implementation, including Concern staff as well as community case workers.

## Research Team

The research programme will be co-led by Stephen Devereux and Keetie Roelen from the Centre for Social Protection at the Institute for Development Studies.

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<sup>i</sup> The graduation approach was first developed by BRAC in Bangladesh and subsequently adapted and piloted by CGAP and the Ford Foundation in an effort to understand how safety nets, livelihoods and access to finance can be sequenced to create sustainable pathways out of extreme and chronic poverty.

<sup>ii</sup> Enhancing the Productive Capacity of Extremely Poor People - Rwanda (2011 – 2016); Terintambwe (Take a step forward) – Burundi (2012 – 2016)

<sup>iii</sup> Burundi: Devereux, S., Roelen, K., Sabates, R., Stoelinga, D. and Dyevre, A. (2015). Final Evaluation Report: Concern's Graduation Model Programme in Burundi. Institute of Development Studies: Brighton. Rwanda: Devereux, S. and Sabates, R. (2016). Enhancing the Productive Capacity of Extremely Poor People in Rwanda: Final Evaluation Report. Institute of Development Studies: Brighton.

<sup>iv</sup> See Sabates-Wheeler, R., Sabates Aysa, R., & Devereux, S. Enabling graduation for whom? Identifying and explaining heterogeneity in livelihood trajectories post-cash transfer exposure. *The Journal of International Development* <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.25041>

<sup>v</sup> See Roelen, K. and Devereux, S. (2018) Money and the Message: The Role of Training and Coaching in Graduation Programming, *The Journal of Development Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/00220388.2018.1475648