



## Enabling Sustainable Graduation out of Poverty for the Extreme Poor in Malawi

### The Graduation Model and Gender Empowerment Research Project in Malawi

**Overview:** As part of the implementation of the Graduation Model in Malawi, Concern and TIME (Trinity Impact Evaluation Unit) at Trinity College Dublin are undertaking a high level Randomised Control Trial (RCT) impact evaluation on the Graduation programme. The aim of this research is to better understand the barriers faced by women in escaping poverty. This research project examines whether the gender of the Graduation programme recipient affects female empowerment, household decision-making, food security and income. Furthermore, the research will look at whether this effect changes when the programme is delivered with a couple's empowerment training called 'Transforming Gender & Power Relations'.

**The Graduation Model:** The model is designed to address the many challenges of extreme poverty by simultaneously boosting livelihoods and income and providing access to financial services. Since the BRAC pilot in 2002, the Graduation Model has been increasingly seen as a tool to help the ultra-poor break out of poverty. The intervention's success in Bangladesh led to significant interest among policymakers worldwide. Impact evaluations found it enabled beneficiaries to engage in microenterprise activities, leading to an income increase of 37% (Bandiera et al., 2016). This effect persisted two years after the intervention.

Following its initial success, an international consortium investigated the impact of the intervention across six different countries (Banerjee et al., 2015), finding that both the short and medium term consumption and income indices increased for treatment households (those who received the program) compared to households in control groups. Per capita income for treatment groups increased by around 5% compared to the control group mean income (Banerjee et al., 2015). Treatment households also saw improved physical health, political involvement, as well as an increase of productive and household assets (Banerjee et al., 2015). To-date, it represents the most promising intervention to tackle extreme poverty.

**Graduation in Concern:** Given this potential to transform the lives of the poor, Concern Worldwide has also implemented the Graduation programme in a number of countries. In Burundi and Rwanda, Concern conducted programme evaluations with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The impact evaluation in Burundi found a significant impact on house ownership, the quality of material that the house is constructed from, the household's access to hygienic toilet facilities and their source of lighting, as well as the number of plots of land used and owned. In Rwanda, they found registered land ownership and home ownership increased significantly for participating households. Food consumption of meat and milk was also much higher 48 months after initiation of the programme, compared to baseline.

**Existing Literature:** There are, however, shortcomings in the Graduation programme literature, particularly on the impact of the programme on gender dynamics. The meta study on the Graduation intervention by Banerjee et al. (2015) found that even when there is a change in the empowerment indices initially, the effect doesn't last, or no effect is found at all. A study by Roy et al. (2015) found the graduation intervention in Bangladesh may have unintended effects, such as decreasing the mobility of women outside the house. Furthermore, while women retained control of the initial asset transfer, any further assets bought from income generated from the initial transfer tended to belong to men.

In a paper by Asadullah and Ara (2016), they found that while women initially increased time spent on self-employment activities, in the long run they slipped back into spending more time on household chores. Meanwhile men tend to increase time spent on micro-enterprise activities, suggesting a takeover

by men of these activities (Asadullah and Ara, 2016). This however only holds for women in male-headed households, while female-headed households were able to maintain their time allocation on self-employment activities.

**Gender Empowerment Research Project:** The research is designed to address the gap on the role of gender in Graduation programme outcomes. The research will estimate the impact of three distinct versions of the Graduation Model on gender empowerment and ultimate household welfare outcomes. The three proposed versions tested are as follows: 1) the graduation programme targeted at women; 2) the graduation programme targeted at men, and; 3) the graduation programme targeted at women but with additional couples' empowerment training called 'Transforming Gender & Power Relations'. Each intervention will be delivered to 600 households randomly selected in Mangochi and Nsanje, with 300 households in each district receiving each version of the proposed program. There will be an additional 750 households in each district who will act as control households.

The impact of the three interventions will be assessed across a range of outcomes using a randomized control trial (RCT) methodology. RCT provides a counterfactual, which represents what would have happened in the absence of the interventions, thus providing robust evidence for the efficacy of the intervention examined. The Graduation intervention in Malawi is a 22-month intense, multifaceted intervention but the research project will be spread over five years to allow for the estimation of medium term effects. The RCT will rely on three rounds of a quantitative survey. A baseline (Q2 2018), midline (Q2 2020) and an endline (Q2 2021) survey will be conducted to capture key welfare measures, as well as important measures of empowerment and spousal cohesion. The quantitative research will be complemented by qualitative research.

**Summary:** Through studying the impact of the Graduation model, the analysis from this research hopes to provide greater insight on the different effects of the Graduation model by gender. Undertaking the research will enable practitioners, such as Concern, as well as policy makers, to identify what, if any, effect the graduation model in Malawi has on the lives of the poor, particularly women. It will identify whether the Graduation programme led to specific improvements in the lives of poor households. This will help provide further information on the mechanisms through which households may be able to move out of poverty. 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 research team is led by the Trinity Impact Evaluation (TIME) research unit and is conducted in partnership with Concern Worldwide. It is supported by researchers from the Gender Innovation Lab at the World Bank. The research team comprises of Professor King and Dr. Bedi (from the Department of Economics, Trinity College Dublin), along with Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Valliant (from the Gender Impact Evaluation team at the World Bank). This research project is funded by Concern Worldwide, and has support from Irish Aid and from the Irish Research Council.

*References:*

- Asadullah, M N., & J. Ara, 2016. "Evaluating the long-run impact of an innovative anti- poverty programme: evidence using household panel data," Applied Economics, Taylor & Francis Journals, vol. 48(2), pages 107-120, January.
- Banerjee, A., E. Duflo, N. Goldberg, D. Karlan, R. Osei, W. Pariente, J. Shapiro, B. Thuysbaert, and C. Udry. "A Multifaceted Program Causes Lasting Progress for the Very Poor: Evidence from Six Countries." *Science* 348, no. 6236 (May 14, 2015): 1260799– 1260799.
- Bandiera, Oriana, et al. "Labor Markets and Poverty in Village Economies." Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, LSE, 2016.
- Roy, S., J. Ara, N. Das & A. R. Quisumbing. 2015. "'Flypaper effects' in transfers targeted to women: Evidence from BRAC's "Targeting the Ultra Poor" program in Bangladesh," *Journal of Development Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 117(C), pages 1-19.

**CONCERN WORLDWIDE MALAWI**

*Lilongwe Office:* Plot # 227, Area 3,  
Mtunthama Drive P.O. Box 1747, Lilongwe,  
Malawi  
Tel: +265 (0) 1 751 437; Fax: +265 (0) 1 751 422  
Email: [mw.concern@concern.net](mailto:mw.concern@concern.net)  
Web: [www.concern.net](http://www.concern.net)

**Funded by:**

