

# Gender Transformative Graduation Programming Technical Brief

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CONCERN  
worldwide

ENDING  
EXTREME POVERTY  
WHATEVER  
IT TAKES

Concern Worldwide understands extreme poverty to be a lack of basic assets and/or low return on these assets, underpinned by inequality, and risk and vulnerability to hazards. Graduation programmes aim to increase asset levels and improve returns on these assets whilst also addressing the many interlinked causes, maintainers and obstacles that prevent people from escaping extreme poverty. Concern first adopted a Graduation approach<sup>1</sup> to livelihood development in Haiti in 2008<sup>2</sup>. Since then, we have implemented Graduation programmes in eight countries (Bangladesh, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia) and reached over 25,000 households and 115,000 direct recipients. Increasingly, Concern's Graduation programmes are including gender transformative approaches at their core.

This brief presents the core components of the Graduation approach, explains the meaning of gender transformative programming, and provides examples from Rwanda, Malawi and Bangladesh, which include specific programme approaches to address gender inequality at the household level. The brief concludes with recommendations for effective gender transformative Graduation programming.

## What is the Graduation approach?

The Graduation approach is an **integrated and sequenced package of support designed to facilitate a pathway out of extreme and chronic poverty**. Programmes consist of a number of core components (please see the box on the right) that together support an individual to engage in sustainable economic activities, either through self- or waged- employment. Essential to this is an understanding of the market system, the roles that men and women play and any barriers to access and participation. Also essential is the timing and sequencing of support which can influence a person's graduation trajectory.

### Gender inequality and the Graduation approach

Rigid gender norms frequently dictate that men dominate intra-household decision-making and take responsibility for the principal income generation, while the division of household labour and childcare responsibilities fall disproportionately to women, reducing their capacity to play a productive role within the family. Gender based violence (GBV) is often used to reinforce men's power and dominance and the gendered expectations they try to fulfil, and can be exacerbated by poverty. GBV causes a myriad of detrimental effects on women, men and entire families that persist from generation to generation, including psychological, physical and economic. All of the gender inequalities mentioned, from power dynamics to gender roles to GBV, are learned behaviours. With culturally sensitive,

#### Core Components of the Graduation Approach

- Comprehensive targeting;
- Income support;
- Technical and business skills training;
- Regular coaching and mentoring;
- Facilitating access to basic (health; education) and financial services,
- Capital/asset transfer

<sup>1</sup> The Graduation approach was originally developed by BRAC in Bangladesh. It was then adapted and promoted by CGAP-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. The approach has been further adapted and refined by Concern Worldwide for application in Concern country programmes.

<sup>2</sup> The programme in Haiti, implemented in partnership with Fonkoze, was one of the original CGAP Ford Foundation-funded pilots of the approach outside Bangladesh.

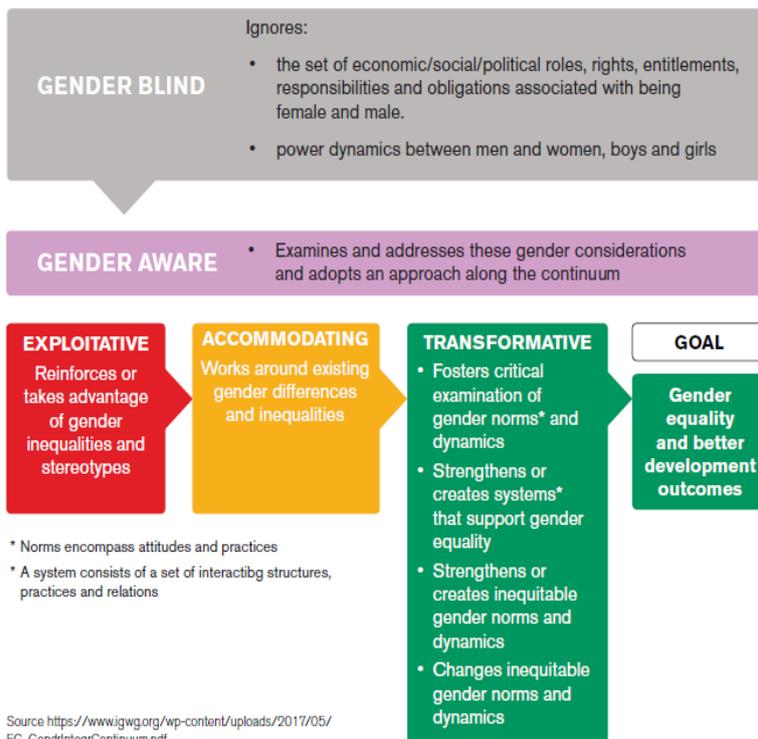
gender transformative approaches, they can also be unlearned, thus removing some of the key barriers to men and women escaping extreme poverty.

# What is gender transformative programming?

Given the critical links between the aim of the Graduation approach and gender outlined above, it is critical that Concern's Graduation programmes apply a gender lens at every stage and take a **gender transformative** approach to tackle entrenched gender norms. This means that we need to:

- **Understand the existing gender roles and power dynamics** in the communities we are working in to identify how they affect attitudes, practices and behaviours that affect household capacity to sustainably emerge from extreme poverty. For example, identify who makes which decisions, who has access to, and capacity for, which income generating activities.
- **Identify the different needs, challenges and preferences** of women and girls, including their autonomy, decision-making power, control of income or household assets, violence, cultural norms and practices, vocational and training preferences.
- Make sure we **do not reinforce negative or harmful stereotypes** ('exploitative' on the Gender Continuum). This could mean, for example, that we do not *only* offer women the opportunity to build their skills in income-generating activities which are traditionally done by women, as these are likely to generate significantly less income than those selected for men. Instead, we can aim to widen the scope of opportunity.
- Design programmes that **address the root causes** of the issues that affect poverty outcomes, such as unequal division of labour, voice and decision-making power by transforming gender attitudes and norms ('transformative' on the Gender Continuum). For more on the gender continuum see Understanding the Gender Continuum Guidance Note<sup>3</sup>.
- Regularly **monitor** programme activities throughout implementation to avoid creating unintended negative consequences.

## The Gender Continuum



<sup>3</sup> [Understanding the Gender Continuum Guidance Note](#), Concern 2020

# Making Graduation Programmes Gender Transformative

A key approach used in gender transformative Graduation programmes is **gender transformative dialogue** with male and female programme participants.

Before implementing gender transformative dialogue, **it is critical that staff have participated themselves in the training content that they will deliver to communities**, and that they believe in the content of this material and the concepts behind it. Concern's global partnership with Sonke Gender Justice has been one way to work towards this through the delivery of gender transformative workshops to Concern and partner staff and to support them to challenge their own beliefs and attitudes. Following this, a **training of trainers** on the specific curriculum is essential. Some countries also hold regular reflective conversations among staff on various gender issues to support staff transformation.

**Monitoring, coaching and support to those facilitating** are key to ensuring quality.

Below are three examples demonstrating how gender transformative dialogue can be integrated within the core Graduation approach.

## Common themes in gender transformative dialogue

- Family visioning
- Gender roles
- Who has power?
- Decision-making
- Gender based violence
- Positive parenting
- Healthy relationships
- Communication
- Household budgeting

## Malawi

### Approach

Concern is implementing a Graduation programme in two districts in the southern region of Malawi – Nsanje and Mangochi. The programme, which commenced in 2017, will reach 1,800 households (8,100 direct recipients) over the course of five years. The programme is implemented over three cohorts, each receiving an integrated package of support over 18-months. In addition to the core components, the programme is also testing the gender transformative dialogue approach with couples through a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) impact evaluation led by Concern and TIME (Trinity Impact Evaluation Unit) at Trinity College Dublin.<sup>4</sup> In the tested approach, female household members are the primary recipients of the range of inputs while she and her partner/husband participate in 12 gender transformative dialogue sessions over 12 months. The research aims to assess to what extent the inputs combined with gender transformative dialogue sessions affects household decision-making, gender attitudes, food security and income.

In the initial stages of this programme, formative research was undertaken to identify the prevailing gender norms, attitudes and practices, including marriage practices (polygamy, matrilineal and patrilineal marriage practices), sex within marriages, household dynamics, the division of household labour, control of money within a household and intra-household decision-making. Based on the findings of this research, a 12-session curriculum was developed, known as *Umodzi*, meaning 'united', which engages couples to reflect upon and discuss issues such as gender norms, power, decision-making, budgeting, violence, positive parenting and healthy relationships.

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<sup>4</sup> Treatment arms: I. Male household members as the primary recipients of programme inputs II. Female household members as the primary recipients and III. Female household members as the primary recipients of plus the female and her partner/husband participate in gender transformative dialogue sessions

Monthly sessions are facilitated with both with the couples together and in single sex groups, with a maximum of 12 couples taking part in any session, each lasting for approximately three hours and facilitated by one male and one female staff member. The sessions on budgeting and decision-making are timed to coincide with the cash transfer in order to prepare participating households for considered use of the money. In addition to the *Umodzi* manual, a Case Worker manual was developed to guide individual follow up visits to households in between group sessions, in which Concern's Graduation Case Workers reinforce the messages discussed in the *Umodzi* sessions using regular reflection and discussion questions.

### Results

At the time of writing, the full results of the research were not available. However, after only two months of dialogue sessions within the pilot cohort, the percentage of Graduation households (a fifth of which were participating in *Umodzi*) in which women were consulted in decision-making had improved from 37% at baseline to 47% at the end of year 1. However, it is important to note that women's participation remains lower for decisions that relate to control over household income. Female participants interviewed during follow-up visits to households expressed that they are now consulted by their husbands on decisions, while male participants demonstrated their understanding of the benefits of engaging their female counterparts in household decision-making for the interest of the family as a whole.

Other promising qualitative findings are also emerging around the impact of the *Umodzi* training on participating households. During the initial period of *Umodzi*, there was notable resistance from a majority of men to attempt to challenge the power they hold, especially with regard to household decision-making on critical matters of finances, sexuality and childbearing. However, regular monitoring has demonstrated that men are taking on more active roles in providing care for their children and taking greater responsibility for household chores. Male programme participants are seen carrying their children to hospitals, thereby freeing women to concentrate on other productive activities in the household and community. For some participants, the shared family vision is a basis for expenditure planning, prioritisation, enhanced spousal mutual accountability, and has been pivotal in strengthening family ties and affection between couples. The household budgeting session also created greater

## Case Study

### Jackson Adam and Margaret Kamwendo



Jackson Adam and his wife Margaret Kamwendo have participated in all 12 sessions of *Umodzi* in Mangochi, Malawi.

Margaret found the sessions very helpful in clarifying her role in decision-making. Before *Umodzi*, she would make suggestions but her husband would say, 'you cannot make decisions for me'. *Umodzi* addressed this issue, covering how both spouses have a role in decision-making. While Jackson remains the main decision-maker in the household, particularly on health care, family planning and childcare, now when Margaret makes suggestions, he considers them before making the final decision.

For Jackson, the most interesting learning he took away from *Umodzi* was on financial planning. He learnt that it is important to discuss it with his wife, so when Margaret receives her monthly cash transfer, they sit down, discuss and agree how to spend it. Margaret confirms this, though from her point of view, what changed as a result of *Umodzi* is that Jackson no longer hides money from her. Instead, he tells her about money he has and together they make decisions about how to use it for the family. For her, the discussions about budgeting during the dialogue sessions has made things easier in their relationship.

Both Jackson and Margaret feel that the training has encouraged them to do more things together and become more united as a couple, and has brought peace to the family. He has also started to help more with household chores, including sweeping and childcare. According to Jackson, these changes have led others to admire him in their village.

trust among some couples regarding the use of income. Critically, conflict and violence has reduced as men started to realise that homes were happier, more peaceful and more harmonious when couples worked together.<sup>5</sup>

## Rwanda

### Approach

Concern has been implementing a Graduation programme called '*Enhancing the Productive Capacity of Extremely Poor People*' in the Southern Province of Rwanda since 2011. Under the first phase of the programme (2011-2106) Concern reached 2,600 households (approximately 12,740 direct recipients) across three Districts (Huye, Nyaruguru and Gisagara) whilst, under the current phase of the programme (2017-2021) Concern is reaching 2,000 households (approximately 9,600 direct recipients) in Gisagara District. The first phase showed that outcomes could have been enhanced by including a component that directly addressed restrictive gender norms. Accordingly, in the current phase of the programme, in addition to the core components of the Graduation approach, participating households receive specific messaging on nutrition and gender relations (for those in couples).

Concern works in partnership with the National Women's Council (NWC) and National Youth Council (NYC) at District and Sector levels who were trained to deliver the 'Men Engage' gender component of the training. Weekly sessions are held with Graduation participants living in couples for a period of three months, covering power, decision-making, asset management, family planning, and positive relationships and encourage proper utilisation of programme inputs. Concern staff regularly monitor these sessions.

### Results

The initial impact evaluation of the programme, undertaken by the Institute of Development Studies in 2015, found that the programme had very positive impacts on a wide range of indicators. These included productive and domestic assets, living conditions, food security, and sanitation and health practices - 12, 36 and 48 months after joining the programme (relative to baseline and compared to a control group)<sup>6</sup>.

Qualitative data showed an improvement in women's decision making ability in the home, improved communication and reduced conflict between couples, increased involvement of men in household chores and childcare and couples being seen as role models to others in the community. In addition, positive programme impacts were found in individual empowerment, especially for women. At the personal level, most

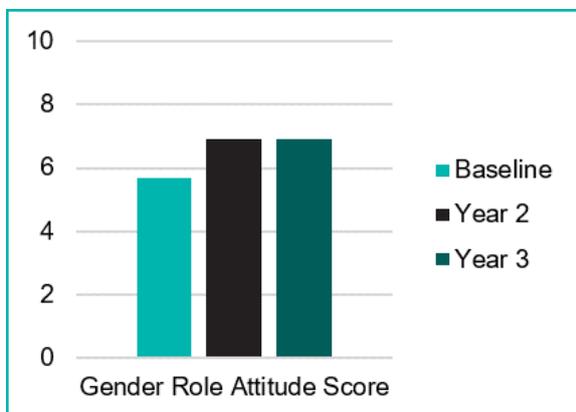


*Judith and Faustim Nsabimama with their daughter in Nyiakibungo cell/ Nkunamo village in Gishubi Sector, Gisagara District. They are participants in Concern's Graduation programme. They purchased their cow through a combination of income generation activities and money received from their asset transfer. Credit: Síle Sammon/ Concern Worldwide*

<sup>5</sup> See the Umodzi learning brief, '[Enabling Sustainable Graduation out of Poverty for the Extreme Poor in Malawi](#)' for a detailed overview of challenges and learning

<sup>6</sup> See Devereux, S. and Sabates, R. (2015) Final Evaluation Report: Enhancing the Productive Capacity of Extremely Poor People in Rwanda. Brighton: Centre for Social Protection, Institute of Development Studies for full evaluation findings

participants increased their sense of self-confidence and control over their life. In terms of economic empowerment, access to cash and assets, the ability to make purchases and access to income-earning opportunities all improved. Respondents also participated more in social events and some assumed leadership roles in their communities, indicating increased social and political empowerment.<sup>7</sup>



These results however, were not achieved without challenges as cultural norms are deeply embedded. During the first sessions of the training, there was an increase in household conflict as a result of awareness on women's rights by participants, which the team responded to with increased home visits from Case Workers.

Annual reporting data 2019, presented in the graph to the left, found an improvement in the gender role attitudes score<sup>8</sup> from 5.7 out of 10 at baseline to 6.9 out of 10 after Year 3.

## Bangladesh

### Approach

Concern has been implementing the 'Improving Lives of Urban Extreme Poor – ILUEP' project in Bangladesh since 2017. The five-year project (2017 – 2021) aims to improve the livelihood security and increase the resilience to shocks of 9,000 extreme poor households living in undeveloped slums, squatter settlements and on the pavements in Dhaka and Chattogram municipalities (approximately 30,000 direct beneficiaries). In addition to the core components of the Graduation approach, the project aims for participants to be able to move from their current location on the pavement or in an undeveloped slum into a rented home, developed slum or to build a house in their rural home. The programme is implemented through nine implementing partners and five strategic/technical partners, and engages more than 30 other stakeholders from the Government and private, NGO and Civil Society Organisation (CSO) sectors.



*Gender Transformation workshop with Change Makers at Chattagarm railway station Ayesha Ahmmed Tania, 2018*

<sup>7</sup> Devereux, S. and Isimbi, R. (2019) Understanding Graduation Outcomes in Rwanda: Coaching, Relationships and Empowerment in Concern Worldwide's Graduation Programme - Research Report for Concern Worldwide

<sup>8</sup> The Gender Role Attitudes score is Concern's composite score generated from a set of 33 statements to assess the extent to which an individual holds positive gender role attitudes that promote gender equality, or negative gender role attitudes that prevent gender equality. The scale includes items related to attitudes towards household and family relations, marriage, economic participation, community leadership and decision-making, women's rights, and domestic violence against women, which compile into an overall score indicative of the respondent's attitudes towards gender equality.

The approach aims to:

1. Increase assets and the return on assets by providing livelihood (skills, apprenticeship, private sector employment opportunities, micro enterprise, savings and loans and block grants) and nutrition support (nutrition advice, mother support groups, activating ward health committees and establishing child day care)
2. Reduce inequality by addressing the patriarchal norms that restrict women from taking control over their lives and their own resources; and advocating with government duty bearers to deliver essential basic services such as health, education, clean water, sanitation and social safety nets to meet the entitlements of the extreme poor.
3. Reduce risk and vulnerability of women and girls to violent attacks and to reduce morbidity and mortality from environmental diseases and HIV and AIDS.

The ILUEP project employs a number of different approaches to engaging men and boys in the fight for gender equality that operate at micro, meso and macro levels.

### Change Makers

The pilot identified key community gatekeepers known as Change Makers to act as gender champions and advocates within their communities. Change Makers received a three-day gender transformative training from partner staff that they use to launch discussions on early marriage, joint decision-making and GBV during self-help group meetings, mother support groups, parents and sibling sessions, and adolescent sessions. They visit 5-10 households per month with messages on the importance of non-violent attitudes between couples and towards children, early marriage, and sexual harassment. They also use make use of tea stalls considered as gathering places for this kind of discussion by men. Change Makers and project staff work together on a national campaign to influence key decision makers, government institutions and other influential bodies to provide better services to girls and women and to support the economic empowerment of women in Bangladesh. It creates awareness on the importance of school enrolment without discrimination and preventing early marriage.

### Results

A mid-term evaluation of the programme undertaken in 2019, found significant changes in certain areas of wellbeing, including material deprivation, livelihood coping capacity, access to improved drinking water and knowledge of HIV. There has also been progress towards several gender outcomes:

## Case Study

### Kamal - Lalabag slum, Labag



I am Kamal. My wife is a change-maker. The lane we live is renowned by her name-Maya Lane. As she did lot as her social responsibility. She sells shari as a hawker and I am a carpenter. After her participation in training she discusses with me about what she has learned. I become the change maker due do her motivation, I have changes few of my behaviour and started discussion with my wife on many issues.

I also go to parents meetings conducted by Nari Maitree. I can't think out of what we have learned from those meetings including being friendly with each other, discuss and take decision about family together, guide the children to grow up together. I used to call my wife to clean our children's faeces. I used to leave my clothes after bath for my wife to wash them. She used to wash it later. Now I provide support to her business, cook and maintain the children when she is outside.

In this slum, we share kitchen with the neighbours who see me cooking often. I used to be shy in the beginning to do this kind women's job. Now I feel proud to do this. The men who saw me doing this yet to be habituated with it but they at least give a hand to their wives during cooking. Everyone respects my family. People now call my wife to solve different problems. I don't mind, rather, I proudly support.

- Women's engagement in household decision-making increased from 16% at baseline to 91% after year 3. This was achieved through the outreach of the Change Makers who directly discussed the issue, as well as increased education for mothers on infant and young child feeding practices, and women's participation in savings initiatives, allowing them to access a regular source of income that contributes to family business and savings. Many also received cash grants for operating microbusinesses and successfully started handling business accounts with the support of other family members. These accumulated efforts resulted in improved economic status and women's participation in decision-making within the family.
- The Gender Role Attitudes score increased from 4.38 out of 10 at baseline to 6.92 after year 3.
- The percentage of women and girls at risk of gender-based violence reduced from 100% to 87% after year 3. Local power structures were involved in project activities aiming to make them aware of issues relating to GBV and to create urgency around the actions required of them.
- Men and boys who believe they can prevent violence against women and girls also increased from 4.38 to 5.95 out of 10 after year 3.

## Summary and Recommendations

The comprehensive package provided under a Graduation approach is designed to build household assets and improve the return on these assets by addressing the causes, maintainers and obstacles that prevent people from escaping from poverty. Inequality is a root cause of extreme poverty and by applying a gender lens and by taking a gender transformative approach to programming we can tackle entrenched gender norms. Whilst approaches themselves may vary (as seen through the cases presented in this paper), dialogue with men and women is vital. Recommendations include:

- Ensuring all activities are informed by a thorough understanding of prevailing gender norms, attitudes and practices.
- Conducting market systems analyses with a gender lens to understand barriers to accessing different employment options.
- Widening the scope of employment options for men and women (self or waged) beyond traditional gender norms by:
  - Challenging rigid gender norms that dictate traditional employment choices e.g. through gender sessions with programme participants;
  - Ensuring equitable access to skills building opportunities e.g. addressing barriers to participation, such as child care;
  - Working with potential employers to ensure gender-equitable implementation of workers' rights and prevent discriminatory recruitment and management practices, including training and monitoring.
- Investing continually in staff attitudes towards gender equality so that they are able to deliver gender transformative programmes effectively.
- Designing opportunities for men and women to challenge rigid gender norms and their harmful consequences at household and community level, e.g. through mixed and/or single sex dialogue.
- Following up on messaging at the household level to mitigate any negative consequences, particularly where cultural norms are deeply embedded, e.g. through assigned Case Workers.
- Designing activities that reach the wider community to transform gender norms and create an enabling environment for change to take place and be sustained e.g. Change Makers, community action teams, media, community campaigns, community conversations.
- Working with local NGO and government partners in order to establish buy from micro, meso and macro level structures, and facilitate wider attitude and behavioural change.