



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

### Targeting Process: Challenges and Lessons Learnt

#### Background

Extreme poverty is prevalent in Malawi, with 25% of the population defined as 'ultra-poor' according to the 2012 Integrated Household Survey (IHS)<sup>1</sup>. Chronic poverty in Malawi can be attributed to low agricultural productivity, poor infrastructure, limited availability of land, high cost of agricultural inputs and recurrent weather shocks, which particularly affect the Southern regions of Malawi, including Nsanje and Mangochi. Concern Worldwide is tackling poverty in these regions through an integrated and multi-sectoral programme using the Graduation approach. This model uses a series of interventions such as agriculture, micro-finance, cash transfers, skills training, household coaching, asset transfers and business development to support pathways out of extreme poverty.

#### 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.

**Number of Direct Beneficiaries:** 8,000 households in total (51,200 total direct beneficiaries). 2,000 as graduation households and 6,000 in the enabling environment. In 2017, 200 graduation households have been targeted and 1809 households under the enabling environment. In this first cohort, as many Social Cash Transfer (SCT) beneficiaries as possible were targeted.

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

#### Targeting Process

The Graduation Programme targets extreme poor households that nonetheless have labour capacity. As comprehensive targeting forms an integral part of the Graduation Model, Concern developed an in-depth targeting method, involving the communities as much as possible throughout the process. Targeting consisted of five stages: a comprehensive wealth ranking, a verification/screening process, pre-registration, registration and a baseline. This was accompanied by regular community sensitizations to receive feedback and increase community ownership. A Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM), set up at the beginning of the targeting process is active throughout programme implementation. The CRM offers beneficiaries a number of channels to voice their concerns and complaints, including a toll free line and complaint boxes. The entire targeting process took 5 months.

<sup>1</sup> The Integrated Household Survey (IHS, 2012)

### Wealth Ranking

The wealth ranking process is a tool used to collect and analyse data on the different perceptions of wealth and inequalities in a community and to identify and understand local indicators and criteria of wealth, well-being and poverty. A community based wealth ranking allows for the active participation and involvement of the community in the process, which increases understanding and ownership of the programme. Concern used a community based wealth ranking to identify the extreme poor and poor households to target for the Graduation programme.

The wealth ranking was carried out in all 25 Group Village Headman (GVHs) of Traditional Authority (TA) Katuli in Mangochi and in 12 GVHs spread across TAs Chimombo, Makoko, Ndamera and Ngabu in Nsanje.

The wealth ranking first involved a community meeting where all households were present to introduce the programme as well as this process. The community was



*Picture 1 – Graduation Programme Beneficiary Esnat Aufi (left) with her children and grandmother Ulengaga Said, in GVH Kwilapo/TA Katuli/Mangochi*

asked to select a number of representatives who would be tasked with categorising households into different wealth categories. The wealth categories were identified by each community separately but generally consisted of four groups: very/extreme poor; poor; middle; better-off.

Separate from the rest of the community, the representatives then came up with wealth categories relevant to their communities and indicators for each of the wealth categories. The representatives then categorised all households in the community in wealth categories and checked that households were real. Concern subsequently developed a list of outcomes and presented this to the community and posted it in strategic places, as well as informed all community members of existing feedback and complaints mechanisms.

The wealth ranking showed that 96% of the population are poor or very poor in Nsanje and 79% of the population of Mangochi are poor or very poor. Furthermore, in Nsanje 69% of poor and very poor households are female headed and this figure is as high as 90% in Mangochi.

### Verification or Screening

Once the wealth ranking had been completed, Concern staff visited all extreme poor and poor households from the list in their 4 catchment GVHs (Mangochi: GVHs Kwitunji and Kwilapo in TA Katuli; Nsanje: GVHs Tizola in TA Chimombo and GVH Ngabu in TA Ngabu). This screening process verified whether these households fall under the extreme poor and poor categories to narrow down the list of eligible households that would be targeted with the graduation package. The verification process included several criteria, which can broadly be clustered under three categories: household demographics; participation in Social Protection programmes; presence of groups with special care needs such as elderly, disabled or chronically sick to determine the dependency ratio. This process allowed households to be ranked in order to identify the most vulnerable ones. Through the verification process Concern identified the 300 most vulnerable households from which the core 200 pilot graduation households were selected.

### Pre-registration

Following the verification process, Concern pre-registered 300 previously identified households, taking into account possible dropouts due to households not fitting the selection criteria of being willing and able to perform an Income Generating Activity (IGA). This process allowed for a more in depth discussion with the households, particularly regarding their willingness and ability to engage in an IGA, which is crucial for the success of the graduation programme. During pre-registration, households where the head of the household did not have labour capacity could identify proxies who would be able to perform an IGA. These proxies had to be above the age of 18 years, live in the same house and the main beneficiary and be willing and able to do an IGA. As Concern had committed to include SCT beneficiaries who were often elderly, those household were asked to select a proxy. Pre-registration also provided a further opportunity to physically verify the wealth ranking exercise. After pre-registration, the 200 most vulnerable households were selected for registration. Of the 200 selected households 69% are female headed<sup>2</sup>. Of the total 200 households 54% are recipients of the SCT. In Mangochi, 59% of SCT households who are part of the graduation programme are elderly headed households and this number rises to 69% in Nsanje.

### Registration

After the pre-registration, the names of the 200 selected households were communicated to the community and the households were gathered together and further informed on the programme. The formal registration was used to collect registration information from the final recipient on a Digital Data Gathering device (DDG). The final list was then communicated to the community and posted in relevant spots. Throughout, the CRM was active and beneficiaries could voice their complaints.

### Baseline

The baseline, as the logical follow up, concluded the targeting process. This exercise allowed for the collection of baseline values for indicators of the Graduation Programme. This information includes findings in the following areas:

- The level of poverty, food security and overall wellbeing experienced by the targeted households in the community.
- The different attitudes regarding Gender inequality and HIV/ AIDS, and how those key drivers of poverty within Malawi are perceived and spread out in the household and community.
- The different types of shocks that affect people's livelihoods and the resources they have to cope with them.

In addition, the baseline was very useful in providing a basic understanding of the dynamics and gaps in the communities where the programme is implemented, which can be used to inform programme activities. Finally, the baseline information can also be used to inform policy and debate about graduation out of extreme poverty and social protection in Malawi.

### Challenges

A number of challenges were encountered during the targeting process which are detailed below.

- **Inclusion of SCT beneficiaries:** One of the main difficulties faced was the inclusion of SCT beneficiaries in the programme. During the verification and pre-registration process it became apparent that the SCT beneficiaries were often comprised of very elderly households with little to no labour capacity.
- **Lack of labour capacity:** As labour capacity is a crucial component in the graduation programme, the inclusion of the SCT households posed a significant barrier. In order to still

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that being head of household and recipient of SCT does not necessarily coincide

register SCT beneficiaries, Concern adopted a method of having proxies for SCT beneficiaries unable to engage in an IGA. The logic behind including proxies was that since the graduation approach targets the whole household, the SCT beneficiaries would benefit from the income generated by the proxy with the help of Concern through training, asset transfer and consumption support. This approach however is only successful if the proxy lives in the same household as the SCT recipient.

- **Use of Proxies:** After finalising pre-registration, Concern noticed that many proxies were not living with the SCT beneficiary. A decision was made that all those households should be excluded from the programme, which led to a reduction in SCT participants.
- **Drop outs:** Despite having excluded SCT households without labour capacity through a proxy in the household, there are a number of SCT households where the proxy lives in the same house. Throughout programme implementation, a number of proxies have dropped out of the programme for a range of reasons. Either they have moved away and were not able to support the household, or they do not see the benefits they receive from participating as they are not the direct cash recipients. This and other unexpected withdrawals from the programme has led Concern having to replace a number of graduation households.

### Lessons learnt

The inclusion of SCT households in the graduation programme is possible but due to the SCT recipients being too elderly to work, the use of proxies is required which poses several challenges as it affects the extent to which the main beneficiary benefits from the programme. For the second cohort Concern has decided to not specifically target SCT recipients, although the latter will be included if they are eligible on all other criteria.

A further lesson learnt from including the SCT recipient was that Concern found many SCT recipients in higher wealth categories above the extreme poor. This could be attributed to the fact that in Mangochi the SCT has been received for the past three years which could have enabled households to a higher wealth category.

Finally, an important lesson learnt through the targeting process was that identifying households with labour capacity is essential to prevent drop-outs. Concern found that throughout the targeting and beginning of implementation households would drop out of the programme for a variety of reasons. These included household heads passing away, proxies moving out of the household or refusing to further participate in the programme and elderly being unwilling or unable to engage in an IGA.

---

#### 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:

