

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

### Highlights from the Baseline Survey on the Graduation Households

The Graduation Model is a 'big push' intervention designed to move people out of poverty by addressing the many challenges of extreme poverty by simultaneously boosting livelihoods and income and providing access to financial services. A recent meta-study confirmed the effectiveness of the model for moving ultra-poor out of poverty long-term (Banerjee et al., 2015).

Since 2017, Trinity College Dublin and Concern Worldwide have been working together to estimate the impact of three distinct version of the graduation intervention on gender empowerment and ultimately, household welfare outcomes. The three treatment arms are: 1) graduation targeted at female, 2) graduation targeted at males and 3) graduation targeted at females but with an additional couple's empowerment training. The impact of the three interventions is being assessed using a randomized control trial (RCT) methodology. RCTs provide a counterfactual, which represents what, would have happened in the absence of the interventions, thus providing robust evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention.

#### Study Design

A total of 3330 households are included in this study. This does not include the 200 households who are part of the pilot Graduation program, which is also being run by Concern Worldwide. Households were eligible to be part of this study if they were categorized as poor or very poor based on a community wealth ranking or a wealth survey, the household head was married and lived with their spouse at least 60 percent of the time, and both members of the couple were able to do an income generating activity. From the 3,300 eligible households, 1,800 were randomly selected to receive the Graduation program, while 1,500 were randomly selected to be part of the control group. Data was collected from both the male and female spouse in these households in a baseline survey that ran between June to July 2018. This brief highlights a few key characteristics of the households that are included in the research.

One of the first main points to emphasise is that, on average, treatment and control households look relatively similar. For example, if we look at the characteristics of male and female spouses across treatment and control groups in Table 1, we see that on average they have a similar age, education and employment profile. Balance checks across a range of indicators show that

significant differences between treatment arms are rare, and when they are apparent, are often related to outliers. For the research, the implications of these outliers is that first we have to understand why we have them and their impact on estimating the differences, second, for significant baseline differences, if relevant to our outcomes, we include the variable as controls in future analysis, and use robust methods to confirm results.

## The Household Profile

From the baseline data, the average household across the full sample is comprised of 5.7 members, with an average of 3.2 children per household. The male and female spouses have on average around 5.5 and 4.6 years of education respectively and are on average 42 and 35 years of age. They are most likely to be employed in daily agriculture labour.

Male & Female Spouse characteristics							
	Control Villages	Treatment Villages	Control Households	Treatment Households	Mangochi	Nsanje	Total Sample
<b>Age</b>	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
Female Spouse	36.08	35.14	35.43	35.22	36.08	34.55	35.31
Male Spouse	42.96	42.39	42.47	42.51	43.91	41.08	42.49
<b>Year of Educ</b>	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg	Avg
Female Spouse	4.43	4.68	4.71	4.58	3.98	5.10	4.64
Male Spouse	5.78	5.53	5.70	5.47	3.99	6.63	5.58
<b>Employment</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Female Spouse	14.79	12.83	14.19	12.33	10.91	19.62	13.19
Male Spouse	62.32	64.42	64.39	63.72	65.67	62.32	64.03

**Table 1: Male & Female Spouse Characteristics**

Twenty six percent of households in the sample are engaged in income generating activities, with the selling of agricultural produce the most likely form of activity. Beans, sugar cane, tomatoes and maize are the four most common forms of produce sold. Apart from selling agricultural produce, women are also engaged in selling meals and snacks and the collection and sale of wood and water.

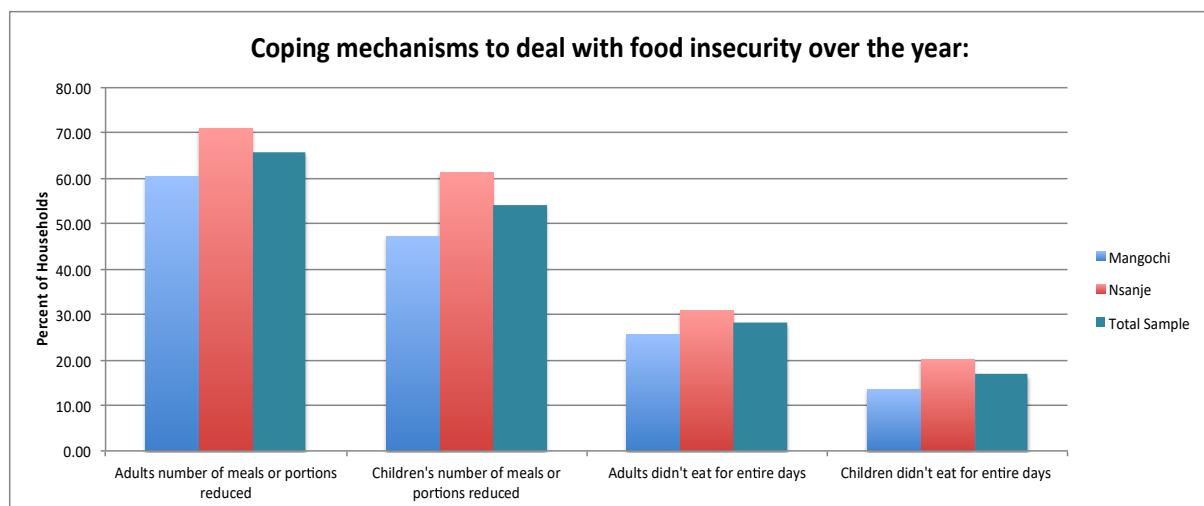
The vast majority of the sample does not save in any way. Only 36 percent of women and 21 percent of men reported saving in a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA), while only 13 percent claim to save at home.

From these households, around 9 percent of households have access to social cash transfers and 8 percent have access to food and cash transfers under the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC). We find slightly higher access to benefits under the public works programme at around 12 percent.

Recipient of Listed Social Protection Programs in the Last 12 Months					
	Control Villages	Treatment Villages	Control Households	Treatment Households	Total Sample
<i>Received benefits from:</i>	Yes %	Yes %	Yes %	Yes %	Yes %
Social Cash Transfer	9.38	9.00	8.77	9.33	<b>9.07</b>
Food Or Cash Transfer under MVAC	8.59	7.98	7.87	8.28	<b>8.09</b>
Public Works Program	11.92	12.02	11.29	12.61	<b>12.00</b>

**Table 2: Social Protection Programme Access in Prior Year**

Overall, 94 percent of the interviewed households cultivated land in the last 12 months, while at least 45 percent of households’ own livestock and poultry. For those who cultivate land, maize is their main crop. Most households do not rate their land highly, giving it a quality rating from low to average. The majority of households do not use inputs for this land. Only around 22 percent use manure, while around 29 percent use chemical fertilizers.



**Figure 1**

Evidence was found to suggest food security is an issue for households. Twenty eight percent of households went without food for at least an entire day in the last year, while over the same period 65 percent of households reduced, at least on one occasion, the portion size for adults and 54 percent did so for children. The two mechanisms that households use to cope with lack of sufficient food, was reducing daily food consumption or skipping all meals for the entire day.

If we now look at what types of shocks these households face, we see that the two main shocks experienced by these households in the last year were drought (41 percent) and attacks by pests on their crops (30 per cent).

## Gender Dynamics

Given the focus of this research, one of the main areas of interest is on gender roles. From the data, we see differences in gender attitudes and norms by district and by males and females. In Mangochi, there is a greater pressure for men to be the most powerful member of the household. In contrast, much higher levels of intimate partner violence have been recorded in Nsanje. Men and women have very different perceptions on how household weekly expenditure allocations are made. Around 45 percent of men state that the couple sits together and jointly determines the needed amount of money, compared to 30.4 percent of women.

<b>How Monetary Allocation for Household Needs is Determined, as reported by Male &amp; Female Spouse</b>		
	<b>Total Sample</b>	
	<b>Male Response</b>	<b>Female Response</b>
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Male Spouse Decides How Much to Give Her and the Amount Changes Every Time	25.47	41.91
Male Spouse Decides How Much to Give Her and the Amount is Usually The Same	8.42	8.30
Couple Sits Together And Decides Based On How Much Is Needed	45.48	30.39
Male Spouse Decides but First Consults Female Spouse and Values Her Thoughts	7.97	5.76
Female Spouse Tells Male Spouse How Much Is Needed To Cover The Needs Of The Household	12.66	13.64

*Table 3*

## Next Steps

Over the next three years, the research will follow these households through the implementation of the Graduation programme. All households in this research study will be visited at the completion of the Graduation Program and one year after. This will enable us to understand the impact of the programme on household gender dynamics and welfare outcomes, such as consumption, savings and food security.

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### FUNDED BY:

