

## Graduation programmes and disruption of intergenerational transmission of poverty<sup>i</sup>

It is widely understood that being born into poverty can have a profound impact on children's development, with serious consequences for educational and economic outcomes later in life.

The British Academy-led GCRF/DFID Early Childhood Development Programme examined how economic strengthening of poor households in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) affects the development outcomes of young children. Evidence suggests that these programmes can improve a number of ECD outcomes such as nutrition, health and education and also improve occupational outcomes. However, exploiting the full ECD potential of these programmes requires additional components of support for parenting and childcare, and an explicit engagement with social norms underlying the gendered division of labour within households.

**Graduation programmes** evolved out of the realisation that those living in extreme poverty required a 'big push' in order to move into a positively reinforcing cycle of improved livelihoods (Carter and Barrett 2007; Hashemi and Umaira 2011) to 'graduate' out of poverty (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2015). These time-bound (often ranging from 18-36 months) programmes typically provided women in extremely poor families a combination of productive assets (such as a cow and poultry), a wide range of technical skills, grants and loans for starting their enterprises, and a small stipend as a social safety net to ensure food security.

### Evidence

Research projects funded by the ECD Programme examined the potential of graduation programmes in improving early childhood development by evaluating the *Targeting the Ultra Poor* (TUP) programme in rural Bangladesh and the *Chemèn Lavi Miyò* (CLM) programme in rural Haiti.<sup>ii</sup> The evidence suggests that children in the beneficiary families in rural Haiti had better physical health, improved food intake and nutrition, and better sanitation and housing. This was a result not only of the improved income of women but also the awareness resulting from the training the women received that improved their self-belief in providing care for their children.

A large-scale longitudinal study that covered a period of 10 years after the delivery of the TUP in rural Bangladesh found that the programme had helped beneficiary women escape poverty and had also reduced the malnutrition and stunting of their children. Their children had a 5% higher probability of completing primary schooling and 6% higher probability of completing junior secondary schooling compared to the control group. Both sons and daughters from the beneficiary group were more likely to attain some level of secondary schooling compared to the control group. The study also reported occupational gains over generations as the share of sons engaged in casual agricultural jobs fell, with an increase instead in those engaged in skilled work. These effects were higher for younger children whose families participated in the intervention than they were for older children.

Whilst this evidence from two diverse LMIC contexts is strongly indicative of the positive effect of graduation programmes on ECD outcomes, there may also be negative effects, as indicated by the evaluation of the CLM in rural Haiti. Facilitating women's participation in the labour market increased their burden of responsibilities as they were still expected by their families and local communities to provide care to young children and other family members. As a consequence of much of their increased economic activity often taking place away from home, mothers had less time and energy to devote to their children, meaning that alternative care arrangements were offered to young children by their relatively older siblings or elderly relatives. This situation was often exacerbated by a lack of appropriate childcare facilities in rural communities. In order to address and counteract these negative effects, the local staff working with the research team committed to no longer inadvertently perpetuating expectations from women that they should be primarily responsible for childcare, economic activities and running the household.

## Recommendations

There are several implications of the insights generated by these projects for the design and implementation of graduation programmes:

- Whilst early childhood development is often not an explicit component of the graduation programmes, these programmes could disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty by weakening the compounded effects of impoverishment on various ECD domains. Greater effects could be achieved if additional ECD packages are added to these interventions.
- The centrality of training and coaching in achieving the goals of graduation programmes indicates that additional training on parenting practices would have an even greater impact on ECD outcomes.
- Intervene as early as possible, as age is crucial in improving ECD outcomes. Interventions at a younger age help in the accumulation of human capital thus improving occupational and economic outcomes.
- Structural inequalities need to be addressed for the optimal ECD gains of these programmes. Improving access to basic services such as education and healthcare of the beneficiary families improves child development indicators.
- Altering gender values at home and in the community around childcare responsibilities is crucial, particularly when graduation programmes shift the gendered division of labour, doubling the burden on women through increased labour market participation and unaltered provision of care. Such a behavioural shift needs to support the increased involvement of men in caring roles.
- The increased economic participation of women also requires addressing the widespread assumption that families should be the sole providers of care. In addition, it requires the provision of community-based affordable quality care facilities.

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i This note was written by Dr Arif Naveed, University of Bath. The British Academy is very grateful for his work. This note is based on British Academy-funded projects 'Economic conditions in early childhood and the intergenerational transmission of poverty in Bangladesh.' (Professor Oriana Bandiera FBA) and 'Pathways to stronger futures in Haiti: how can economic strengthening through comprehensive social protection improve early childhood development?' (Dr Keetie Roelen). The projects are part of the British Academy-led DFID/GCRF programme on [Early Childhood Development](#), which investigated the dynamics of early childhood development in low- and middle-income countries.

ii Innovated by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), TUP is a two-year programme that combined the components of livelihoods, social safety nets, financial inclusion and social integration. It combined productive assets with cash transfer and long-term investments including life skills, technical and vocational training, enterprise development, behavioural change and financial planning. A similar approach has been taken in the *Chemen Lavi Miyò* (CLM) programme that was implemented by the NGO Fonkoze in rural Haiti.