

Helpdesk Research Report

Post-graduation from social protection

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Question

What do the longer-term assessments of social protection programmes tell us about sustainable impacts? Is there evidence of good practice from states offering support to people who have ‘graduated’? How can we design social protection graduation programmes so they can most effectively help people become more productive, including by transitioning from informal to formal sector employment?

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1. Overview

This paper reviews the results of social protection programmes which aim for beneficiaries to graduate out after they reach a certain level of assets or time. It explores whether people who graduate from the programmes are lifted sustainably out of poverty, and what changes they experience in their lives and livelihoods. The first part of the report reviews general lessons about how graduation happens and whether there are any impacts on employment, and the second part of the paper reports the results from longer-term or follow-up evaluations of graduation programmes.

It is important to note that only some social protection programmes aim to graduate beneficiaries – for example, pensions are not intended to move recipients on, and some households do not have graduation potential (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2011). This paper therefore reviews only a small segment of social protection programmes, which aim to sustainably lift beneficiaries out of poverty. These are usually livelihoods programmes, and the vast majority consist of cash or asset transfers combined with livelihoods skills training, support, and sometimes healthcare, literacy and numeracy. This report also includes a few conditional cash transfers (CCTs) for education, as these have a natural graduation when

the recipient children leave school. There were no graduation results found from other social protection programmes, such as health insurance, old age pensions or disability grants.

There are only a few long-term evaluations which cover a period of more than five years since the end of the programme – these tend to be in the area of CCTs for children’s education, since these kinds of programmes started in the 1990s. Livelihoods programmes, which are the majority of graduation programmes, tend to have evaluations assessing changes two or three years after graduation. This provides a reasonable evidence base but the very long-term effects are as yet mostly unknown. There are currently only weak links drawn between graduating from social protection programmes and long-term effects such as higher wages, social mobility and better health, and no examples of linking one programme to another with a different provider (for example, transition from NGO to state). However, there is an emerging evidence base on the two- to three-year effects of social protection livelihoods programmes, with new lessons emerging particularly from the BRAC/CGAP model, which indicate positive findings and identify some of the necessary attributes to successfully transition out of poverty.

The evidence base is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative material, including some randomised control trials (RCTs). The findings are mixed on what works, as results vary across different programmes and countries. There are often positive results on gender equality, since many social protection programmes target women. It is possible to draw out some common features of success and failure of these programmes.

Key findings from the literature are:

- **Evidence is mixed** on long-term effects. Some programmes have had positive long-term impacts, while others have found effects diminishing over time. These mixed results show an unclear picture of what works, and why.
- Results from Brazil’s Bolsa Família show that the programme **does not create dependency** and it **does not jeopardise entry into the labour market**. However, Ethiopia’s PSNP does appear to have some dependency issues.
- **Success factors:**
 - **Personal skills and pre-existing assets** of the beneficiaries. Experience in and understanding of the chosen livelihood strategy is important.
 - **Social networks, peer support and confidence** have played a strong role in successful graduation. **One-to-one mentoring** from programme staff has also been helpful.
 - Graduating beneficiaries **from one programme into another** appears to be a successful approach. For example, BRAC/CGAP move beneficiaries from income support to microfinance, which maintains assistance over a longer term and provides an incremental graduation.
 - **Complementary interventions** have shown success; e.g. skills training and social support.
- **Constraints:**
 - Cash or asset transfers alone are not enough.
 - Nearly all literature notes the existence of **structural barriers** against graduating out of poverty. Social protection cannot move people sustainably out of poverty when they

face market failures, environmental shocks and infrastructure weaknesses. The **state has a role to play** in creating an enabling environment.

- Education CCTs in general seem not to have had positive effects on employment in the long run. Beneficiaries successfully complete more years of schooling, but this does not translate into better economic opportunities. There is a gap which some suggest the state should fill.

2. Long-term sustainability of graduation

Constraints and enablers

Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2011) draw a distinction between ‘threshold’ and ‘sustainable’ graduation, where the former constitutes passing the arbitrary threshold required to leave a programme, and the latter is a real transition out of poverty. The authors state that they are aware only of social protection programmes which reach threshold graduation. They add that none achieve sustainable graduation, and that this is assumed but not empirically tested. They suggest that sustainable graduation is determined by resilience in the face of a negative change after exit from the programme. Based on analysis of three social protection programmes¹, the authors outline the **constraints and enablers** of sustainable graduation, which is used in much of their subsequent work on this issue (p.11):

- The **market context** into which households move upwards, particularly after the asset threshold has been reached – households need a functional market and opportunities to secure livelihoods.
- The **initial resource conditions and efficiency** of existing assets – initial endowments, at both household and community level, have a strong effect on the likelihood of moving out of poverty.
- The **scale of transfer and coverage** – if the transfer is too small, or is shared between many household members, its impact is diluted. Conversely, the higher the number of people in a community receiving the transfer, the higher the effects.
- **Household level incentives** (and associated dilution effects) for moving beyond the asset threshold – beneficiaries may choose to use their transfers in a way which does not lead to graduation.
- **Environmental context** and natural shocks – vulnerability and unpredictability of the environment means graduation is unlikely to be linear.

These aspects can be both enablers and constraints to sustainable graduation, and programme design should aim to understand these broad contextual issues. Particularly, the authors note (p.16) that **programme designers need to address context constraints** such as market access, seasonal shocks and infrastructure in order to achieve sustainable graduation. These constraints largely concur with the results from the BRAC and CGAP programmes (Hashemi & de Montesquiou, 2011).

Slater (2009) points out that the expectations of graduation are not in proportion with the scale of CT programming in many countries – CTs are often too small or too thinly spread to enable graduation. There is little evidence that CTs increase asset portfolios and/or human capital to the point where significant impacts are seen on employment and wage income (Slater, 2009).

¹ Bangladesh: ‘Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor’ (CFPR/TUP); Ethiopia: ‘Productive Safety Net Programme’ (PSNP); Rwanda: ‘Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme’ (VUP)

Employment

A particular sub-area of interest is whether social protection programmes lead to changes in employment status, which is an indicator of sustainability and social mobility. There is no evidence that programmes currently support a change from informal to formal sector employment, since they usually focus on transitioning people from irregular daily work into entrepreneurship, rather than employee status. However, they do appear to support **strong entrepreneurship skills**, and one of the positive outcomes noted in many reports is that beneficiaries have the confidence to run businesses or to take microfinance loans, which indicates a higher level of participation in the labour market. BRAC/CGAP have shown positive results in a move away from day labouring in favour of self-employment for beneficiaries. This is described in the literature as a positive result, although entrepreneurship can be equally insecure. Results from Brazil's Bolsa Família show that the **programme does not create dependency** and it does not jeopardise entry into the labour market (Machado et al., 2011).

The child education CCTs have somewhat mixed results on employment opportunities. In general, there is **no evidence that this has any positive effect on employment**, beyond what would be expected for the number of years of school completed (Rodríguez-Oreggia & Freije, 2012). This means that CCT beneficiaries are in equal positions (barring social inequalities) to their non-beneficiary peers who have the same amount of schooling. However, there are a small number of studies which show that beneficiary children have achieved higher learning outcomes than their peers, which indicates a transformative effect of the CCT (Barham, Macours, & Maluccio, 2013; Maluccio et al., 2006). There is not clear evidence on this subject, but some specific programme outcomes are discussed below.

Overall, the **results of graduation are mixed**, without particularly clear success factors. The results shown below are therefore presented as case studies, as each programme has experienced different effects and it is difficult to synthesise the results clearly.

3. Case studies

This section reports the results from longer-term or follow-up evaluations of graduation programmes.

BRAC Bangladesh: Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR/TUP)

This is one of the best-known and best-evaluated graduation programmes. Its first phase ran from 2002-2006. It transferred assets to Bangladeshi women designated as 'ultrapoor', combined with income support for consumption, skills training, assistance with healthcare and access to finance (Hashemi & Umaira, 2011). Participants graduate when they pass over the threshold from 'extreme' to 'moderate' poverty, at which point they are encouraged to access BRAC's standard microfinance programme. Assets were chosen over food or cash, as these were considered to be more sustainable.

The programme has many rigorous internal and external evaluations. Some were conducted with the same group of people at baseline, endline, and three years after the programme's end (Hashemi & de Montesquiou, 2011). These provide important insights into the process of graduation and the longer-term effects of social protection. The **evaluations regarded the programme as very successful** in diversifying incomes and livelihoods, and decreasing the percentage of persons in extreme poverty. Its positive results overall are (Hashemi & de Montesquiou, 2011: 9):

- **Graduation rate:** 95 per cent of beneficiaries graduated on the basis of fulfilling six out of nine indicators, such as food security, diversified income sources, asset ownership, improved housing, and school enrolment.
- **Poverty:** Three years after the end of the programme, 92 per cent of participants moved above the half a dollar a day threshold (from a baseline of 85 per cent).
- **Food security:** Chronic food insecurity fell by 47 percentage points three years after programme end. Annual food expenditure rose by 93 per cent, and caloric intake increased over 22 per cent. The upward trend continued a year after the programme's end.
- **Savings and credit:** Participants save more than nonparticipants. Approximately 60 per cent of beneficiaries also save informally. The percentage of participants with outstanding loans increased from 27 per cent at baseline to 77 per cent in 2005.
- **Empowerment:** By the end of the programme, 83 per cent of selected households felt more confident about coping with crisis and accessing resources from their communities.
- **Health:** Spending on medical treatment increased. Sanitary conditions improved, with a majority of participants accessing latrines and wearing sandals when they use them.
- **Additional results:** A larger number of boys were enrolled in primary school a year after the programme ended; there was no change in girl's schooling.

It is important to note that positive effects continued to **multiply over time**. In 2005, at endline, 53 per cent of participants had moved above the extreme poverty line (Hashemi & Umaira, 2011). By 2008, three years after the programme finished, a further 41 per cent had crossed the extreme poverty line (Hashemi & Umaira, 2011). These positive impacts on income, employment, food security and assets are assessed as largely sustainable in the long run (Misha & Das, 2010).

With regards to employment, Misha and Das (2010) found that there was a **significant increase in self-employment** (one of the programme aims), **decreasing reliance on day labouring or domestic work**. A long-term RCT of the programme looks at employment choices before, two years after, and four years after programme implementation (Bandiera et al., 2013). The study shows that four years after the programme, participant women's wage employment (seasonal, insecure) decreased by 17 percentage points, and self-employment (entrepreneurship) increased by 15 percentage points (p.4). The results show a **step change in occupational practices**, with more labour hours in self-employment, which are spread more regularly across the seasons, and an increase in per capita household spending and reported life satisfaction. The study believes these to be sustainable and permanent impacts on occupational change, which bring the poor closer to the middle classes.

Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2011) attribute programme success to two factors:

- The complementary cash transfer for the first 18 months, to cover subsistence needs;
- Skills training and links to income-generating activities.

There is consensus across the literature on CFPR/TUP that much of the **success rests on the confidence, empowerment, social networks and skill** of the participant women (Misha & Das, 2010; Hashemi, & Umaira, 2011).

Hashemi and Umaira (2011) note that **ill health, old age and dysfunctional marriages** are some of the constraints which stop people from graduating successfully. Healthcare after graduation is a particular problem as the discontinuation of free healthcare meant some households could no longer access healthcare. Misha and Das (2010) present some case study experiences of beneficiaries. One woman in

the microfinance phase did not fare well because she faced health shocks and expenditure, but has however gained the confidence to take another loan and try again.

Structural barriers also exist: access to and viability of markets; environmental issues; and access to schooling and healthcare (Hashemi & Umaira, 2011). These are out of the control of individuals or the programme, although the state and private sector can contribute to some aspects of the necessary enabling environment (Hashemi & Umaira, 2011). This paper acknowledges that not everyone can graduate from extreme poverty through market-based economic livelihoods strategies, and that a development programme is limited in how much it can achieve.

CGAP-Ford Foundation Graduation Program

This programme adapts and tests the graduation approach used by BRAC to see if it works in different contexts and has run ten pilots in eight countries from 2006 to 2009². The five building blocks of the approach, adapted by each country programme, are: targeting, consumption support, savings, skills training and regular coaching, and an asset transfer (Hashemi & de Montesquiou, 2011). 'Graduation' refers to graduation out of the programme and into sustainable livelihoods after 18-36 months. Whether a beneficiary is ready to graduate is measured in terms of **resilience** rather than crossing a threshold line (Hashemi & de Montesquiou, 2011). The results of the projects are assessed in RCTs and qualitative follow-ups. These are not yet all completed but the latest documentation is available on the website³.

There is mixed evidence on the programme's long-term successes, but there is positive evidence in some contexts that the programmes have helped some people move sustainably out of poverty. This is attributed to a variety of factors. Key among them are the **graduation from one programme to another**, **meaning support is long-term**, and the **importance of peer networks and relationships**. Examples from some of the longer-term evaluations follow.

West Bengal

There is a strong set of positive results from the CGAP pilot in West Bengal, India, titled Targeting the Hard-Core Poor (THP) and run by the NGO Bandhan. The RCT final evaluation showed positive results, and a qualitative follow-up study was conducted three years after the programme finished.

This study (Sengupta, 2013) shows longer-term positive results, compared with non-participants. The author attributes this primarily to the fact that beneficiaries have **stayed in the system**, as they continue to be supported by Bandhan, in its microfinance scheme rather than the THP. Access to non-predatory loan sources and peer networks has helped households continue their upward trajectory. A secondary factor is the **skills learnt** in the THP about financial management, accumulating savings, and creating social networks.

Participants appear hopeful and confident, and households have better health, nutrition and more reliable economic activities. Participant households had higher levels of assets and savings than non-participants, making them more resilient to shocks. Savings, and **the habit of saving, appear important to sustainability**. Participants have also retained most of the health and social messages imparted through weekly group meetings and coaching. This is an important finding and shows that **regular teacher-student style coaching and message reinforcement** can have a mid-term effect on household wellbeing.

² Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Pakistan, Peru and Yemen.

³ <http://www.cgap.org/about/programs/cgap-ford-foundation-graduation-program>

This report notes that there is no state support for programme graduates, and that mid-level programmes such as microfinance can provide a useful next tier.

Andhra Pradesh

A follow-up evaluation of the SKS Ultra-Poor Program in Andhra Pradesh, India, showed more mixed results two and a half years after the programme finished. Programme participants were **more confident and had greater networks** than before. The positive findings on confidence and empowerment should not be under-estimated, as these enable participants to demand rights from the state (Jawahar & Sengupta, 2012). However, positive outcomes in terms of financial literacy, health-seeking behaviour and social development, **diminished over time** to the point where participants were **not better off** than non-participants (Jawahar & Sengupta, 2012).

Asset accumulation was very mixed, with some women with **pre-existing advantages** doing extremely well, and women without support systems mostly indistinguishable from non-participants (Jawahar & Sengupta, 2012). Women with no previous experience in their chosen livelihood asset were quite likely to lose their asset and fall back into poverty, while **those with some prior experience did much better** (Jawahar & Sengupta, 2012). Participants chose their own asset, but this has presented challenges to those without enough information. There was little diversification of assets. Households often keep one child at home. There is no continued savings behaviour; **all respondents cashed out their savings** to repay household debt or expenses. Positive health and social behaviours had not been internalised.

Jawahar and Sengupta (2012) suggest that the less positive results were due to the **lower level of coaching from staff**. Staff interacted with beneficiaries almost exclusively in group meetings, with little time for individual relationships. The authors suggest more one-on-one time might have accrued more benefits. The authors conclude that **most beneficiaries have not sustained their gains**, particularly in health and savings behaviour. They argue that increased mentoring and better livelihoods information and support may have increased the positive outcomes.

Mexico: Oportunidades

Oportunidades is a CCT with conditions attached to health, nutrition and education. One RCT study shows that Oportunidades increases household consumption by 5.6 per cent compared to non-beneficiary households four years after joining the programme (Gertler et al., 2012). This study suggests that agricultural investments during the 18 month period of the programme had long-term lasting effects on living standards. This is one of the first papers to consider the longer-term impacts of **productive investments** of CTs. Based on existing results, it extrapolates that after the five and a half years of the study period, household consumption will increase by 41.9 pesos per capita per month, which is a substantial percentage of the baseline of 159.8. The authors suggest that this **improvement will be permanent**, and that beneficiaries would not fall back into poverty if removed from the programme.

González de la Rocha (2012) provides a brief overview of the impacts which Oportunidades had on children's educational and life outcomes, studying one of the original cohorts of beneficiaries, aged between 8-12 years in 1998. The study shows that non-beneficiaries tended to have the lowest levels of schooling and the lowest-paying occupations. On the other hand beneficiaries were clustered in a way which showed social mobility: they had **higher education and higher-paying jobs** than their parents. The gender gap in education has also been bridged as a result of the programme, with **girls now equally or more educated** than boys.

These results are tempered by Sánchez and Jiménez (2012), whose study shows that rural indigenous and mestizo child beneficiaries have difficulty accessing formal and well-paying jobs after leaving school. Most beneficiaries successfully completed more years of schooling than their direct peers, but this has not always translated into better long-term outcomes. Many young people settle in their original communities and adopt informal and temporary economic activities, as the **state has not provided further livelihoods support**. The authors suggest that there is a gap for beneficiaries after completing schooling that the state needs to fill to ensure they can capitalise on their increased learning.

This is borne out by Rodríguez-Oreggia and Freije (2012), which shows that the programme has had **very little impact on employment, wages or occupational mobility**. They conclude that the programme only has positive effects on the human capital (education) of beneficiaries. No further effects are found on the probability of being employed in comparison with similarly-educated peers, and wage increases are found only among males exposed at least six years to the programme. No effects were found on occupational mobility. The study cohort remained in the project area, which the authors suggest implies that the **local markets are still very limited**, despite participants' higher education. Participants who migrated might have had better employment outcomes.

Comparable studies on CCTs and education

Two other studies raise an important issue which is also present in Oportunidades – whether the increased years of schooling result in higher **learning outcomes**, and whether this translates to greater economic opportunity after leaving school. A study from Colombia shows that CCT beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries perform at the same level on achievement tests, with no increase in learning outcomes (Báez & Camacho, 2011). Programme planners assume that more schooling has positive effects on employment for all school leavers, but no difference is expected between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Barham, Macours, and Maluccio (2013) follow children receiving education CCTs in Nicaragua approximately seven years after the transfer stopped. In contrast to the above, they find that exposure to the programme has had positive long-term effects on learning achievement as well as number of years in school, which provides positive evidence for the long-term sustainability of programme effects.

One important study (Maluccio et al., 2006) reviews impacts in Guatemala 25 years after a nutrition intervention ended, one of the only studies to have such a long term review (expert comments). It shows that the early childhood nutrition intervention has positive and substantial effects on years of schooling, reading comprehension, and cognitive tests.

These mixed results show an unclear picture of what works, and why.

Ethiopia: Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)

Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2011) describe the key features of this project. It is mainly a **public works programme**, where community representatives select beneficiaries able to work, and beneficiaries receive either cash or food in return for working on community asset building. Beneficiaries unable to work receive a direct cash or food stipend. Households graduate when they can meet their food needs without the programme. Beneficiaries are graduated off the PSNP transfer but moved onto the Household Asset Building Programme for a further year, which aims to encourage households to increase incomes and assets through agricultural extension and credit services. Households are also provided with

training in associated business and financial skills and appropriate savings facilities. During the first phase of the PSNP from 2005-2009, there has been a low level of graduation.

Sabates-Wheeler, Tefera and Bekele (2012) include some results from that first phase, interviewing its graduated beneficiaries to see how they felt about graduation, approximately two years later. There was a good understanding of the process and concept of graduation, with the criteria of food security quite well understood by beneficiaries. However, the staff members identified that there were **mixed feelings about graduation** among the beneficiaries – some were not ready, some did not want to lose the transfer, and some self-graduated because they did not want to work in the public works scheme. In a quantitative survey, **nearly half the households reported that they were not ready to graduate** at the time they were nominated. 67 per cent of female-headed households did not feel ready to graduate, in comparison to 47 per cent of male-headed households. Most groups knew that there was an appeals mechanism against graduation, but they were hesitant to use it.

In one district, only one out of three waves of graduation was considered to be successful, with respondents saying **recurrent droughts had not allowed graduates to remain food secure** and that many had returned to the PSNP scheme. Overall, 75 per cent of respondents said that their food security situation had improved to some extent or a lot after graduation.

The PSNP has a graduation quota, which may push some people into graduation before they are ready. In addition, there seems to be **some evidence of a dependency problem**. One staff member said beneficiaries viewed the transfer as a salary, and were reluctant to leave the programme (p.12).

Brazil: Programa Bolsa Família (PBF)

An ILO/UNDP research programme looks at the implications of large-scale social assistance on the Decent Work Agenda. The assessment of Bolsa Família is presented in Machado et al. (2011). This paper, synthesising the results of several studies on PBF examining its impact on the labour market, specifically looks at **whether PBF creates dependency** and a retreat from the labour market. Quantitative studies seem to show that adults in beneficiary households, both employed and self-employed, tend to work around two to three hours less per week than non-beneficiaries. There are very **mixed results** depending on gender, rural/urban location, former income and other variables. Many beneficiaries moved into more formalised work in the period 2004 to 2006, but the authors assert this is due to the general formalisation of labour relations in Brazil during this time, rather than as a result of the PBF. PBF beneficiaries were **successfully integrated into the labour market**, increased their average hourly wages, and became less precarious. There is no evidence that beneficiaries became dependent on the transfer or that they chose to work less. The overall conclusion is that the **PBF does not appear to jeopardise labour market performance**, as there are no clear negative effects of the programme on work.

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Key websites

- International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth: <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pages/newsite/menu/socialprotection/whysocialprotection.jsp?active=3>
- CGAP-Ford Foundation Graduation model: <http://www.cgap.org/about/programs/cgap-ford-foundation-graduation-program>
- ILO/EU Linking Social Protection and Employment Growth project: <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectSpePage.do?pid=1175>

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