



DO GRADUATION PROGRAMMES ACTUALLY WORK

INTRODUCTION

Graduation programmes have emerged as one of the most prominent approaches to addressing extreme poverty. Rather than relying on a single intervention, they combine productive assets, skills development, coaching, savings promotion, and temporary consumption support to help households build sustainable livelihoods and strengthen resilience over time.

But how effective are these programmes in practice? As governments, development partners, and humanitarian actors increase investment in economic inclusion initiatives, this question has become more important than ever.

Evidence from across the world shows that well-designed graduation programmes can improve incomes, assets, food security, and overall well-being. At the same time, important questions remain about sustainability, scalability, and whether these gains endure beyond the period of direct support.

In this edition of our newsletter, we examine the evidence behind graduation programs, drawing lessons from global experience. We explore what drives success, the challenges that persist, and what these lessons mean for the future of economic inclusion programming.

What the Evidence Shows

OUTCOME AREA	
 <p>Income</p>	<p>WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS</p> <p>Multi-country RCT (Banerjee et al.) shows a ~5.8% increase in consumption/income across 6 countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan, Peru) Long-term: +8% in Ethiopia after 7 years.</p> <p>NOTABLE EXAMPLES</p> <p>Ethiopia: Sustained +8% consumption after 7 years.</p> <p>Kenya (BOMA/PROFIT): Participants show increased household income and diversified income sources.</p>
<p>Food security</p>	 <p>WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS</p> <p>Food security improves by 0.1–0.2 standard deviations across countries (RCT evidence).</p> <p>NOTABLE EXAMPLES</p> <p>Ethiopia (RCT site): Food security improved by +0.139 SD (2 yrs) and +0.186 SD (3 yrs).</p> <p>Uganda (IPA study): Graduation programmes led to significant improvements in food security and nutrition outcomes.</p>
<p>Savings</p>	 <p>WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS</p> <p>Savings increased by ~96% (nearly doubled) across RCT sites.</p> <p>NOTABLE EXAMPLES</p> <p>Ethiopia: Savings remained ~72% higher after 7 years.</p> <p>Uganda (Trickle Up): Strong uptake of savings groups and increased household savings.</p>
<p>Assets</p>	 <p>WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS</p> <p>Asset ownership increased by 14–32% across countries in RCT evaluations.</p> <p>NOTABLE EXAMPLES</p> <p>Ethiopia: +24% asset growth after 7 years.</p> <p>Kenya: Participants show increased productive assets (livestock, small enterprises).</p>
<p>Resilience</p>	 <p>WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS</p> <p>RCT evidence shows sustained improvements across outcomes, with impacts lasting at least 1–3 years post-programme and up to 7+ years in some cases</p> <p>NOTABLE EXAMPLES</p> <p>Ethiopia: Long-term resilience seen through sustained increases in assets (+24%) and savings (+72%).</p> <p>Uganda: Graduation programmes improved income, consumption, and wealth across communities, strengthening resilience.</p>

What Makes Graduation Programmes Successful?

- **Integrated support package:** Combining asset transfers, livelihood support, savings, coaching, and consumption support delivers the strongest results.
- **Sequenced interventions:** Addressing immediate needs first enables households to invest in long-term livelihoods.
- **Continuous coaching:** Regular mentoring and follow-up improve participant outcomes and sustainability.
- **Market-aligned livelihoods:** Livelihood activities are most successful when linked to local economic opportunities.
- **Tailored support:** Adapting interventions to household needs increases programme effectiveness.
- **Access to systems and services:** Connections to markets, financial services, extension services, and social protection strengthen long-term outcomes.
- **Resilience building:** Savings, diversified livelihoods, and social networks help households withstand shocks.
- **Quality implementation:** Strong delivery, monitoring, and community engagement are critical to success.

Sustainability: Do the Gains Last?

Sustainability sits at the heart of the graduation discussion. While many programmes deliver encouraging gains in the short and medium term, the real test is whether households are able to protect, build, and sustain those gains once direct programme support ends.

Sustained outcomes are more likely when graduation approaches are embedded within broader social protection and economic inclusion systems, rather than implemented as isolated, stand-alone, time-bound projects.

For Africa, the road ahead lies in adapting graduation approaches to local realities while expanding them in ways that do not compromise quality. Policymakers and practitioners will need to balance ambition with practicality, ensuring that programmes respond to differences in livelihoods, gender dynamics, geography, and climate risk.

As countries advance investments in graduation strategy, the emphasis should remain on evidence, flexibility, and stronger coordination across sectors and levels of government.

Graduation programmes are not a silver bullet, but they remain one of the most rigorously tested approaches for helping ultra-poor households move towards more secure and sustainable livelihoods. Their long-term value will depend not only on the strength of the systems that support households after graduation.

Ultimately, **graduation works best when it is locally grounded, shock-responsive, and connected to a broader pathway of long-term inclusion.**



**STANFORD GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**
Seed Transformation Program

Our ongoing transformation journey with Stanford Graduate School of Business continues to unlock practical learnings that are strengthening our systems and enhancing the way we deliver impact.

During our latest sessions, we deepened our understanding of financial and operational performance management. By exploring the use of financial data for strategic decision-making, strengthening cash flow management, mapping value chains, identifying operational bottlenecks, and assessing our organizational maturity, we gained practical insights to improve efficiency, optimize processes, and drive greater impact across our work.

We also hosted a section of business leaders from Africa who are participating in transformation program at our offices.

Their visit provided a valuable opportunity for peer learning, knowledge exchange, and meaningful conversations on organizational transformation, leadership, and building systems that drive sustainable growth and impact.

As we continue this journey, we remain committed to learning, innovation, and strengthening the foundations that enable us to serve better and create lasting change.



CHASP INSTITUTE

Across Africa, social protection systems are at critical crossroads. Communities continue to face escalating shocks from climate change, humanitarian crises, economic volatility, and persistent poverty. As the needs of the sector are constantly changing, there is a growing focus on investing in skills to equip sector professionals to design, manage, and innovate resilient and inclusive social protection programs.

To respond to this need, we are launching CHASP Institute, a flagship initiative of CHASP Advisory focused on equipping policymakers, practitioners, and development actors with practical, applied skills

grounded in both global best practices and African realities. The institute will serve mid- to senior-level professionals across government, development partners, NGOs, and the wider social protection ecosystem.

More than a training platform, the Institute will serve as a hub where knowledge, research, and real-world experience converge to equip professionals with the tools and insights needed to drive meaningful change. More details are coming soon as we unveil our first course and introduce the faculty who will guide this exciting learning journey. Stay tuned!



NOMADIQ

WORKSPACES

- DAY PASS
- COWORKING
DESK
- DEDICATED
DESK
- PRIVATE
OFFICE
- CONFERENCE
OFFICE
- STUDIO

Work no longer lives in one space. Once, work meant a desk, a building, a fixed address. But today, work moves. It adapts. It shifts. It refuses to be still. Today, professionals move between cities, projects, and ideas. They work from laptops, shared spaces, and wherever opportunity takes them.

We are creating a workspace that is designed for this new way of working.

NomadIQ workspaces. Inspired by Africa's nomadic communities, the workspace brings together mobility and purpose, offering thoughtfully designed spaces that support focus, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful connection for founders, freelancers, remote workers, and teams alike.

More details about NomadIQ Workspaces will be shared soon.



PUBLICATIONS

The Ultra Poor Graduation Approach

This overview by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) introduces the graduation model, explains its core components, and summarizes the evidence on how it can improve livelihoods, savings, food security, assets, and well-being among extremely poor households.

[READ MORE](#)

The effectiveness of the Graduation Approach: what does the evidence tell us?

This paper by Development Pathways offers a critical perspective on the graduation approach, helping readers engage more carefully with debates around impact size, sustainability, and whether some claims about “graduation” may be overstated.

[READ MORE](#)

Targeting the Ultra-Poor to Improve Livelihoods – J-PAL

This evidence summary by J-PAL brings together findings from multiple country experiences and shows how graduation programmes have affected consumption, food security, savings, assets, and psychosocial well-being.

[READ MORE](#)

Kenya Ultra-Poor Graduation Strategy (KUPGS) 2025–2030

This official strategy by the Government of Kenya outlines the country’s policy direction for integrating ultra-poor graduation into broader social protection and economic inclusion systems, with a focus on coordination, standardization, and scale.

[READ MORE](#)

From Extreme Poverty to Sustainable Livelihoods: A Technical Guide to the Graduation Approach

This technical guide by the World Bank Group and Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI) provides practical guidance on how graduation programmes are designed, sequenced, adapted, and implemented, especially within government-led systems.

[READ MORE](#)



ONLINE COURSES

Social Protection for Sustainable Development

This course by UNSSC provides a comprehensive introduction to social protection within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It focuses on how social protection systems can reduce poverty, inequality, and vulnerability across the life cycle.

[MORE INFO](#)

Making Universal Social Protection a Reality

This self-paced course by SDG Academy in partnership with ILO introduces the fundamental principles of social protection and its critical role in addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and economic insecurity. It covers the design and implementation of social protection systems, including social protection floors and lifecycle coverage.

[MORE INFO](#)

Advocacy and Communication for Social Protection

This specialized course by ITCILO focuses on building strong advocacy and communication skills to advance social protection agendas. Participants learn how to engage stakeholders, influence policy, and effectively communicate social protection initiatives to diverse audiences.

[MORE INFO](#)

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