CLOSING THE GAP

Evidence & Opportunities for Adapting Poverty Graduation for the Most Fragile Contexts

SEPTEMBER 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUGGESTED CITATION

Kim, Jeeyon, Daniel Hudner, and Olga Petryniak. 2025. *Closing the Gap: Evidence and Opportunities for Adapting Poverty Graduation for the Most Fragile Contexts*. Portland, OR, USA: Mercy Corps.
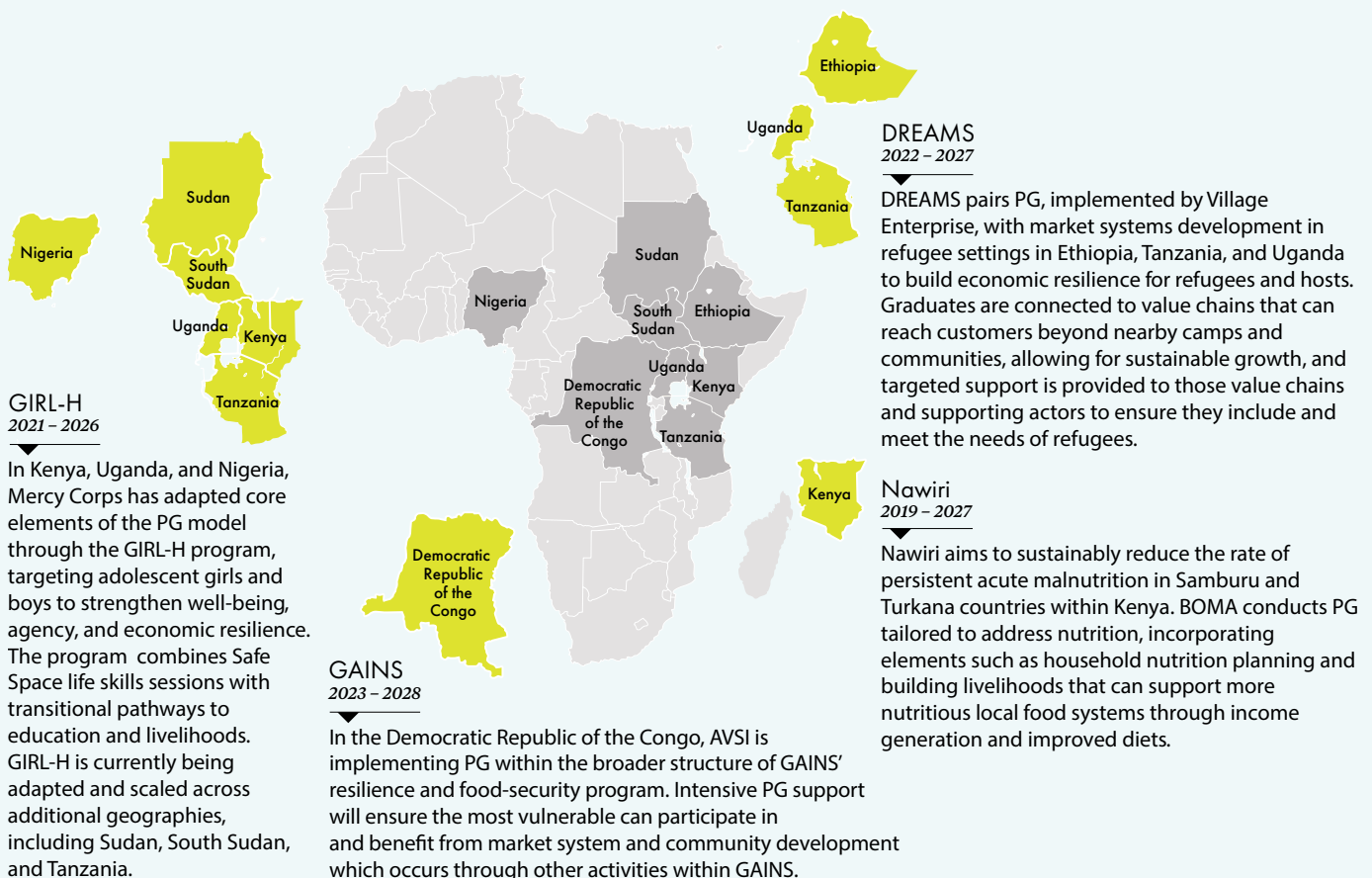
Introduction

Over the past two decades, Poverty Graduation (PG) has emerged as one of the most promising and rigorously evaluated approaches to improving well-being for ultra-poor households in low-income countries. PG programs have demonstrated consistent impacts on these households' ability to achieve improvements in income, consumption, food security, and psychosocial well-being (Banerjee et al., 2015; J-PAL, 2023). However, the majority of this evidence comes from relatively stable rural settings, where participants are typically sedentary, markets generally function with minimal disruption, and service delivery systems are present, if under-resourced. These conditions differ significantly from the fragile, shock-affected, and thin-market contexts where many of the world's most vulnerable populations now reside, as more frequent and severe climate shocks and conflict increasingly drive poverty and food insecurity (Mercy Corps, 2024).

With our partners, Mercy Corps is adapting Poverty Graduation approaches to the complex and often dynamic environments in which we work. Together, we have identified promising opportunities to strengthen sustained, multi-dimensional impacts of the core PG model for these contexts.

IMPLEMENTING IN PARTNERSHIP: MERCY CORPS' COLLABORATION IN THE POVERTY GRADUATION APPROACH

Mercy Corps partners closely with leading Poverty Graduation implementers such as Village Enterprise, BOMA, and AVSI on initiatives that span economic inclusion, food and nutrition security, and durable solutions. We complement their core PG models with integrated service delivery, systems strengthening, inclusion, and resilience-building interventions. Through these partnerships, Mercy Corps has focused on testing which complementary interventions generate additional impact, enable scale, or improve cost efficiency—and identifying the adaptations needed to suit specific contexts, populations, and goals in fragile settings. While some programs are undergoing rigorous evaluation to establish causal impact, experiential learning from implementing teams has also been highly valuable. These programs are shown in the map below, with key lessons highlighted throughout the brief.

GIRL-H
2021 – 2026

In Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, Mercy Corps has adapted core elements of the PG model through the GIRL-H program, targeting adolescent girls and boys to strengthen well-being, agency, and economic resilience. The program combines Safe Space life skills sessions with transitional pathways to education and livelihoods. GIRL-H is currently being adapted and scaled across additional geographies, including Sudan, South Sudan, and Tanzania.

GAINS
2023 – 2028

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, AVSI is implementing PG within the broader structure of GAINS' resilience and food-security program. Intensive PG support will ensure the most vulnerable can participate in and benefit from market system and community development which occurs through other activities within GAINS.

DREAMS
2022 – 2027

DREAMS pairs PG, implemented by Village Enterprise, with market systems development in refugee settings in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda to build economic resilience for refugees and hosts. Graduates are connected to value chains that can reach customers beyond nearby camps and communities, allowing for sustainable growth, and targeted support is provided to those value chains and supporting actors to ensure they include and meet the needs of refugees.

Nawiri
2019 – 2027

Nawiri aims to sustainably reduce the rate of persistent acute malnutrition in Samburu and Turkana countries within Kenya. BOMA conducts PG tailored to address nutrition, incorporating elements such as household nutrition planning and building livelihoods that can support more nutritious local food systems through income generation and improved diets.

In settings affected by conflict and climate shocks, PG programs must navigate structural barriers—such as weak markets, limited services, and systemic exclusion—compounded by displacement, asset loss, and competition over increasingly scarce and degraded natural resources. These constraints undermine the durability of household-level gains and call for programming that extends beyond individuals, engaging with the broader systems people rely on to cope, adapt, and recover. This includes improving access to water and property rights, and strengthening the availability of goods, services, and market linkages that support resilient local economies.

Our experience from programs in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria points to ways PG models may be adapted to better respond to these realities, while increasing reach, durability and even cost efficiency: by aligning livelihoods with market systems development, tailoring activities for specific vulnerable groups and outcomes, and supporting household and community resilience to sustain well-being through future shocks. This report identifies four emerging learning areas that address critical evidence gaps—particularly in fragile contexts—and offer significant potential for adaptation and innovation:

1 **Pairing PG with market systems strengthening and service delivery**

2 **Adapting PG for adolescents and other marginalized groups**

3 **Improving nutrition and sustaining food security outcomes through PG models**

4 **Complementing PG with risk-informed programming**

These areas are drawn from the broader literature, Mercy Corps and partners' operational experience, and a review of recent and relevant evidence. These sources show the great potential PG already holds as a scalable model to lift people out of poverty. Our aim is to highlight areas where further adaptation and evaluation can inform policy and practice, to ensure that PG programs are inclusive, sustainable, scalable, and increasingly cost-effective in the fragile settings where we work.

MERCY CORPS POVERTY GRADUATION LIVING EVIDENCE REVIEW (JAN. 2025)

New evidence on Poverty Graduation—both as a standalone model and when combined with complementary approaches—is emerging rapidly. This review reflects Mercy Corps' analysis as of January 2025. Where possible, we prioritized meta-analyses that synthesize findings across multiple rigorous impact evaluations, like J-PAL's 2023 review of 19 RCTs across three continents, and Banerjee et. al.'s 2015 synthesis of BRAC's six RCTs which marked the start of PG's prominence. These offer the strongest insights into what works consistently across diverse contexts, populations, and design variations. However, in the fragile, shock-affected, and thin-market settings where Mercy Corps operates, the evidence base remains limited. In these cases, we drew more heavily on individual studies, recognizing that their findings are context-specific and less generalizable. We also incorporate in-depth reviews and secondary analyses that surface insights not always visible in published results, including on targeting accuracy, differential impacts, and sustainability.

Poverty Graduation:
Proven Foundations with Room to Grow

PG is a time-bound, multi-component approach designed to address the overlapping constraints that keep households in extreme poverty. Developed and first implemented by BRAC in Bangladesh, PG combines a sequenced package of interventions which typically includes coaching and mentoring, short-term consumption support, savings facilitation, livelihoods training, and productive asset transfers. These interventions aim to stabilize consumption, support asset accumulation, and expand livelihood options.

Poverty Graduation programs are generally delivered over 18–24 months and emphasize sustained engagement with participants through individualized support. While details vary by implementer and context, most PG programs follow a similar structure and sequence: first stabilizing the household through consumption support, then supporting income generation, and finally building financial and social capital, with strong mentoring and coaching throughout. Over time, many implementers have adapted the model, adding complementary elements—such as access to health and nutrition services, integration with social protection programs, or market systems development. The effectiveness and benefits of these more integrated approaches are now being tested in diverse contexts.

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - DRC

CONSISTENT ECONOMIC AND WELL-BEING IMPACTS

PG is one of the most rigorously evaluated approaches to reducing extreme poverty. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and long-term studies across multiple countries have documented improvements in consumption, income, savings, asset holdings, food security, and psychosocial well-being (Banerjee et al., 2015; JPAL, 2023). Table 1, compiled from J-PAL's 2023 review of Poverty Graduation evaluations, highlights this consistency with at least 70% of the reviewed studies reporting statistically significant results in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Results in Latin America are mixed due to the small number of studies.

TABLE 1: Consistency of results, by outcome and region*

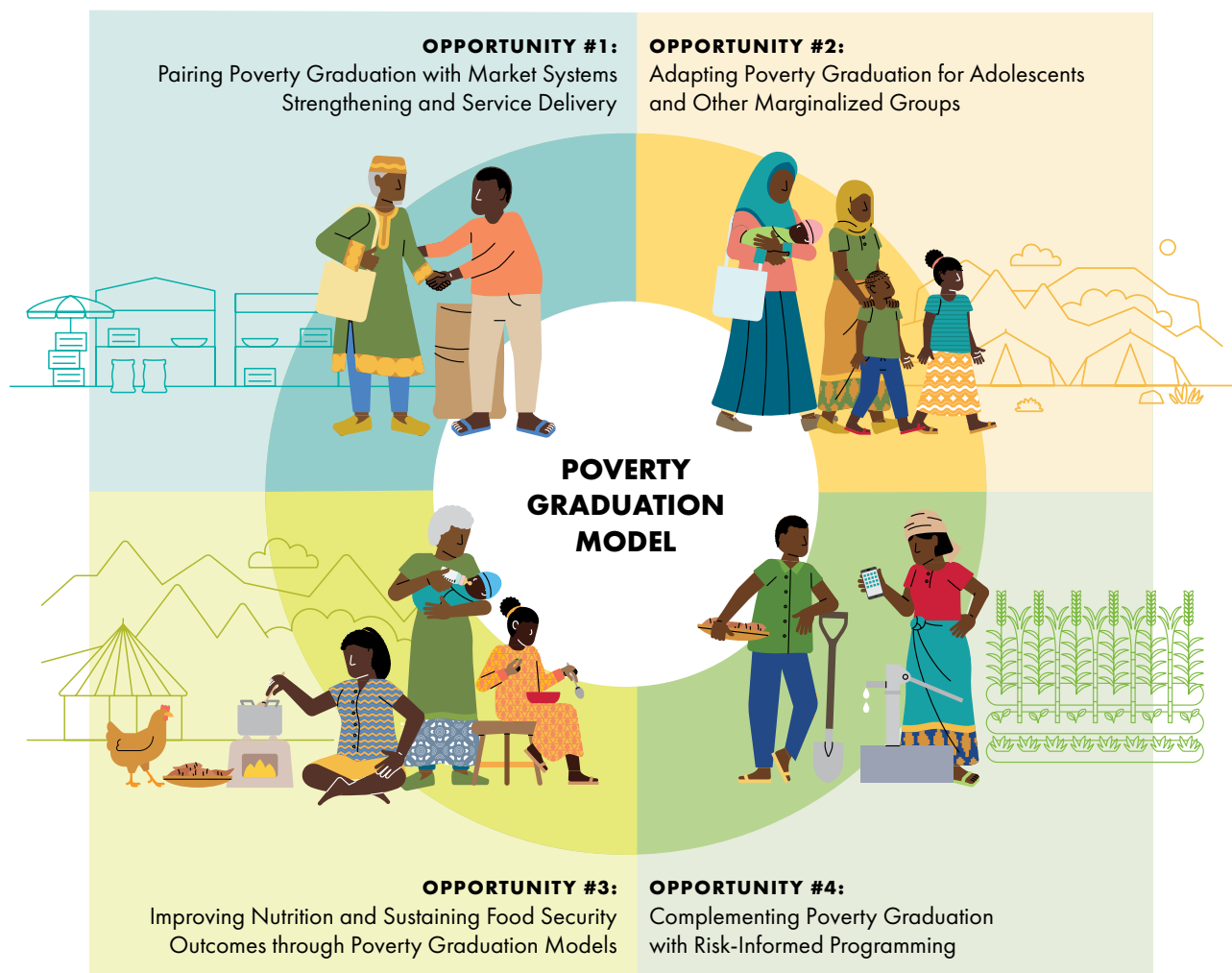| REGION	STUDIES	CONSUMPTION	INCOME	FOOD SECURITY	ASSET HOLDINGS	SAVINGS
Africa	10	Consistently positive [7 of 9]	Consistently positive [9 of 10]	Mixed positive [5 of 8]	Consistently positive [9 of 10]	Consistently positive [8 of 10]
South Asia & Middle East	7	Consistently positive [5 of 6]	Consistently positive [6 of 7]	Mixed positive [3 of 5]	Consistently positive [7 of 7]	Consistently positive [5 of 5]
Latin America	2	Mixed positive [1 of 2]	Mixed positive [1 of 2]	Mixed positive [1 of 2]	Mixed positive [1 of 2]	Mixed positive [1 of 2]
Total	19	Consistently positive [13 of 17]	Consistently positive [16 of 19]	Mixed positive [9 of 15]	Consistently positive [17 of 19]	Consistently positive [14 of 17]

*Results within a region are marked as consistently positive when more than two-thirds (67%) show statistically significant positive results, and mixed positive when between one and two thirds (33 – 66%) show statistically significant positive results.

Across the studies, J-PAL found income increased by 7% to 65%, and consumption by 11% to 30%, measured 18–36 months post-intervention. Comparatively fewer studies assessed food security, and among those 60% reported statistically significant results, although the findings for food security are less consistent than other impact areas. Additionally, five of the nine studies that assessed mental health or psychosocial indicators reported improvements in well-being, life satisfaction, and stress levels. Other organizations have found similar results; a six-country RCT commissioned by Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation (Banerjee et al., 2015) saw statistically significant improvements across 10 key indicators—including income, assets, savings, food security and psychosocial well-being at the programs' end. These effects persisted at least one year after the program ended in most sites, and benefit-cost ratios exceeded 100% in five of six countries. Notably, food security was measured as consistency of meals for different household members, with no measurements taken of nutritional content or quality. Both Banerjee et al. (2015) and J-PAL (2023) found that food security gains were more sensitive to shocks, seasonality, and service access than other economic indicators.

While there are fewer longer-term studies, their findings also suggest that PG can lead to sustained change—particularly in more robust market contexts like BRAC's Bangladesh programs. Seven years after participation, 95% of BRAC's PG households remained above the extreme poverty line, with sustained gains in consumption, diversified income sources, and asset accumulation (Bandiera et al., 2016). A follow-up 11 years later found that impacts on labor supply and asset ownership persisted, especially for working-aged women who had shifted into self-employment (Ibid). These positive and enduring findings have prompted growing interest among donors, multilaterals, and governments—many of whom are exploring how to integrate PG into broader poverty reduction and social protection strategies. The approach's flexibility and ability to address multidimensional poverty make it particularly appealing in settings where cash alone may not be enough.

Jjumba Martin / Mercy Corps - Ethiopia

OPPORTUNITY #1:
Pairing Poverty Graduation with Market Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery

OPPORTUNITY #2:
Adapting Poverty Graduation for Adolescents and Other Marginalized Groups

POVERTY GRADUATION MODEL

OPPORTUNITY #3:
Improving Nutrition and Sustaining Food Security Outcomes through Poverty Graduation Models

OPPORTUNITY #4:
Complementing Poverty Graduation with Risk-Informed Programming

Evidence-informed Opportunities to Advance Poverty Graduation in Fragile Contexts

As PG approaches are tested in more diverse and fragile settings, implementers are adapting core components to better meet the needs of distinct populations and contexts. While the original model emphasizes intensive, full package delivery, recent efforts are exploring variations in design and delivery—by revising sequencing, simplifying or layering components, and adjusting delivery for specific groups. Many of these efforts are motivated by increasing sustainability, scale, and cost efficiency in more risk-prone and marginalized environments.

Based on existing evidence and program experience, we identify four opportunity areas to strengthen PG's relevance and performance in fragile and crisis-affected settings. These areas reflect growing interest in how the model can be adapted to improve sustainability, scalability, and inclusion—particularly in settings marked by thin markets, displacement, recurrent shocks, and limited institutional capacity for crisis prevention, response, and recovery.

As the model evolves, learning in these domains will be essential to ensure that PG remains adaptive, relevant, and capable of supporting sustained gains in the complex environments where Mercy Corps and our partners operate. In the sections that follow, we outline each opportunity area and highlight emerging insights from program implementation and research.

OPPORTUNITY

#1

**PAIRING POVERTY GRADUATION WITH
MARKET SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING AND SERVICE DELIVERY**

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The PG approach has proven its ability to improve household-level economic outcomes, with impacts extending years beyond the end of programming, and high ratios of dollars generated in higher income to dollars invested by donors.

- Evidence on PG programs operating within thin and distorted market systems is limited but growing. In some contexts, PG has been as effective as in stronger markets. In others, its impact has been constrained by a lack of viable and diverse market-based economic opportunities, weak institutions, policy distortions, and frequent economic shocks.

- Pairing PG with market systems strengthening activities shows strong potential to overcome these constraints. Combined approaches can protect and expand participants' businesses and income in volatile, or thin market environments. Aligning livelihoods with market development fosters more diverse, market-driven business opportunities for PG, ensures more robust and consistent flows of goods and services that entrepreneurs rely on, and ensures that local economies continue to adapt and grow beyond the life of the program. Importantly, early evidence suggests that the crowding-in of service providers and new businesses creates new jobs or opportunities for non-PG participants as well, creating a replication effect and driving scale. Such approaches can also address governance and institutional constraints that can limit access to water, land, and other resources supporting livelihoods.

- Mercy Corps and its partners are testing this approach through the DREAMS program in refugee-hosting areas of Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania, through the Nawiri program in Kenya, and through the GAINS program in the DRC. Early evidence on the DREAMS program suggests improvements in savings, income diversification, and relationships with local value chain actors.

PG provides targeted support to help households overcome economic and social exclusion. But in fragile and thin-market contexts, household-level push interventions alone are rarely sufficient. Weak or disrupted markets and enabling environments can limit the durability of PG outcomes. Integrating PG into systems strengthening activities may represent an opportunity for scale and sustainability, even for the most vulnerable populations experiencing growing climate and conflict challenges. PG provides an intensive infusion of assets, money, and training, which naturally produce immediate benefits for economic well-being. Its use of entrepreneurship helps ensure that these benefits are sustainable after the program's end. As a result, PG is more likely to succeed in areas where participants can grow their businesses—where functioning markets demand their products, and where support services are available to sustain their operations.

MERCY CORPS' PUSH-PULL FOUNDATIONS

Mercy Corps operates in places where poverty is shaped not just by household constraints and social dynamics, but by thin markets and limited institutional capacity to prevent, prepare for, or respond to crises. These settings are also often affected by insecurity and conflict that can drive displacement and exacerbate household vulnerability.

To simultaneously address both household constraints and contextual limitations like thin markets and poor institutional capacity, Mercy Corps combines **push** and **pull** strategies to support both individual progress and broader systems-level change.

- **Push interventions** provide targeted, time-bound support—such as training, financial management capabilities, or asset transfers—to help the most marginalized prepare for meaningful participation in those systems. Poverty Graduation is one of the most comprehensive examples of a "big push" approach, but other integrated rural development interventions fall into the same category.

- **Pull interventions** aim to strengthen the systems people rely on—markets, services, and governance—so they are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups over the long run. For example, supporting agricultural input markets to ensure smallholder farmers can access quality seeds and fertilizers at fair prices can help integrate them into more productive value chains.

The interaction of PG with different types of market environments is currently understudied (though active metanalyses at the time of writing will further address this topic), but lessons can be drawn from comparisons of specific programs and evaluations. The six-country RCT led by Banerjee et al. (2015) found that sustained improvements in income and consumption were tied to sites with more robust labor or input markets. Similarly, a 2021 RCT by IDinsight evaluating Village Enterprise's PG programming in Kenya and Uganda found stronger impacts in Kenya, which were attributed to greater market access and sales opportunities for the new microenterprises (Gallardo et al., 2021).

These studies—as well as Mercy Corps and partners' programming experience—emphasize that complementary market system strengthening activities may be needed, particularly as PG is applied in increasingly more fragile and thin market contexts, where businesses need more diverse and consistent supply chains and buyers to maintain viability, and where humanitarian assistance has saved lives but limited local investment options. Market systems strengthening can reduce the risks for businesses to enter new regions or target poor populations. This often works through facilitation approaches that broker relationships, improve access to market information, and ease regulatory barriers—helping to create more inclusive and accessible markets that sustain Poverty Graduation outcomes and enable long-term business growth.

Adding more activities to already costly PG programs (typically $500–$1,500 per participant) can be an obstacle to scale. But market strengthening activities can be lower cost per household and have proven both efficient and cost-effective. Mercy Corps' facilitation-based market systems development programs, without a PG component, typically cost $22–$85 per household reached and generate additional income from $0.80 to $3 per dollar spent (Mercy Corps, 2025). These figures are similar for other implementers: a 2021 BEAM review of market systems development evaluations found that 7 evaluated programs cost between $12–$571 per household, generating between $0.30 to $5 per dollar spent (Albu and Osorio-Cortes, 2021). Because these approaches change local market dynamics to function more inclusively, they can also reach a larger group than PG programs alone, albeit at a lower intensity.

DREAMS: BRIDGING POVERTY GRADUATION AND MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

Mercy Corps' DREAMS program, implemented with Village Enterprise in Uganda and Ethiopia, attempts to combine PG with market systems strengthening to offer more opportunities in refugee camps. In Uganda, more than 7,000 host and refugee participants received the graduation package. At the same time, DREAMS supported private sector actors seeking greater production of sunflowers, sesame, and poultry to invest in the camp. Through vouchers, the program facilitated new seed and extension service providers to begin or expand work in refugee camps, and allowed PG participants to purchase start-up inputs, building trusted relationships in the process. DREAMS has also addressed emerging barriers to refugee agri-businesses, advocating for government-supported land clearance programs for more arable land. With women forming the majority of the participants and entrepreneurs, the program has also addressed initial resistance to their increased role as buyers and sellers in the marketplace by facilitating community discussions and sensitization.

Early evidence on the DREAMS program suggests improvements in savings, income diversification, and relationships with local value chain actors (Mercy Corps, 2024 and Mercy Corps, 2025). The program is exploring what it will take to sustain these gains, given the thin market and limited demand for production internal to the refugee camps. DREAMS has used a facilitative model to encourage long-term independent investment by the private sector and build relationships between communities and government that can lead to a long-term environment supporting market growth.

The benefits of combining market-strengthening with PG are not limited to improved sustainability and scale. Market actors may also be better placed to deliver key PG components that suit their specific context, including business training, updated extension support, and even early warning and climate information. Many of these functions can increasingly be folded into digital platforms used for customer engagement by the private sector, at low added cost. While not replicating PG entirely, private sector ownership of many PG activities may offer a path for sustainability after development funding runs down and programs end.

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Uganda

Market systems strengthening extends beyond buying down the risk for new private sector partners – from input suppliers, to off-takers, to financial service providers – to enter more remote and underserved markets. It includes working with and strengthening the full range of service providers that local economies rely on to function, ranging from information services, land and water security, dispute resolution mechanisms, and even social protection during shocks. Many of these services are provided by government or community institutions. Under the Nawiri and DREAMS programs, Mercy Corps partners closely with government and communities to strengthen access to critical services that provide an enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship, including access to water, extension services for climate resilient production, securing access to land, and community dispute resolution. These activities also offer the benefit of reaching a wider community scale, benefiting not only PG participants but also the communities around them.

Across our programs, Mercy Corps is learning that effective and scalable PG delivery depends not only on household readiness, but on the business environment. Increasingly, we treat market engagement as essential infrastructure for durability, cost-effectiveness, and scale—co-investing with the private sector, reducing reliance and normalization of subsidies over time, and tailoring delivery to the real economic conditions in which households live and work.

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Ethiopia

#2 ADAPTING POVERTY GRADUATION FOR ADOLESCENTS AND OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- PG models have produced consistent economic gains across diverse settings, including for refugees and host populations. These gains form a critical starting point for building more resilient pathways out of poverty.

- Yet, benefits remain uneven—often favoring those with fewer structural barriers or greater initial resources. In both stable and displacement-affected contexts, outcomes are shaped by factors like prior entrepreneurial experience, social networks, and access to markets and services.

- Emerging evidence highlights the opportunity for PG models to better support participants facing constraints such as limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, or reduced access to opportunity structures.

- Mercy Corps and partners are adapting PG approaches to address these gaps. In Uganda, the DREAMS initiative integrates psychosocial support and referral pathways for refugee and host participants affected by trauma. In Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, GIRL-H tailors PG components to adolescents' life stage and unique vulnerabilities while expanding support for education and reproductive health. These efforts are reducing participation barriers, strengthening enabling environments, and generating learning on how to better sequence support, refine delivery, and expand evaluation to support more inclusive and sustainable PG programming.

Even in stable contexts, evidence suggests that PG benefits are not equitably distributed. Several evaluations of early PG programs found that participants often included individuals above international poverty lines (Kidd & Athias, 2019; Emran et al., 2009), and that sustained gains were more likely among those with pre-existing advantages. For example, Misha et al. (2014) found that BRAC participants in Bangladesh who were already entrepreneurs at baseline experienced larger and more sustained improvements. Similarly, IDinsight's (2021) evaluation of Village Enterprise's PG programs in Uganda and Kenya found that although asset accumulation did not show a clear relationship with baseline wealth, households with relatively more resources experienced the largest gains in consumption. Many studies do not disaggregate outcomes by baseline poverty status, limiting insight into effects for the poorest (Gallardo et al., 2021).

While PG approaches aim to address the multidimensional nature of poverty, implementation and evaluation have often prioritized economic indicators—such as income, consumption, assets, and savings—as primary measures of success. This focus can obscure the structural and social barriers that shape poverty trajectories, especially for marginalized groups. Displacement, caregiving responsibilities, restrictive gender norms, and psychosocial stressors may exclude individuals not only from labor markets but also from the services, legal protections, and social networks essential to long-term well-being. Emerging evidence suggests that PG models must better address these dimensions—both in program design and evaluation—to support more inclusive and sustained pathways out of poverty (see for example, Carter, Zheng, and Jensen, 2022).

Recent studies offer further insight into how PG performs in displacement-affected settings. In Uganda, an RCT by Innovations for Poverty Action assessed a PG program targeting both refugees and host communities. Results showed positive impacts on income, savings, food security, and psychological well-being across both groups, although the effects were larger and more durable among host households, likely due to differences in baseline conditions and access to opportunities (Brune et al., 2023). In Mozambique, a quasi-experimental study by the World Bank and UNHCR found that while both refugee and host households experienced income gains and business growth, impacts were more consistent among host populations. These findings suggest that while PG holds promise in these settings, outcomes are shaped by pre-existing assets, social networks, and market access (Beltramo et al., 2024; Heil et al., 2024). Continued testing and adaptation will be critical to strengthening effectiveness in high-risk, rapidly changing environments.

LESSONS FROM DREAMS: EMBEDDING MENTAL HEALTH IN PG MODELS

Displaced populations face unique mental health challenges stemming from trauma, yet these needs often go unaddressed in traditional livelihoods programming. One recent study found that 31% of refugees in East Africa exhibited depressive symptoms, and 61% showed functional impairment—nearly three times the rates observed in host communities (Pozuelo, Bradenbrink, Stierna et al., 2023). Depression can limit individuals' ability to participate in training, engage in group-based activities, and plan for the future.

In the DREAMS program in Uganda, mental health emerged as a critical factor influencing economic recovery among both refugee and host populations. In response, we partnered with organizations specializing in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to integrate Interpersonal Group Therapy into the PG model. This includes screening for depressive symptoms and establishing referral pathways for clinical and protection services. These adaptations aim to recognize and address psychosocial well-being as a core pillar of long-term resilience and economic recovery.

These findings raise important questions about how well PG models address the needs of the most vulnerable, including those with fewer productive assets, limited labor capacity, or heightened social marginalization. Adolescents, in particular, remain under-considered in most PG designs, despite their growing demographic significance and potential contribution to intergenerational poverty reduction. Few evaluations disaggregate outcomes by age or track adolescent-specific indicators, leaving major gaps in our understanding of how well PG reaches and benefits younger household members. This underscores the need for more consistent evaluation of differential impacts within PG cohorts, and a clearer understanding of how well PG serves those facing the most severe constraints.

Adolescents—particularly girls—represent another critical and often overlooked group in PG contexts. Defined as individuals aged 10–19, adolescents are in a formative life stage marked by rapid cognitive, physical, and social development. Many contribute significantly to household labor, caregiving, and income, while navigating transitions in education, identity, and autonomy. Many are expected to be married and have children before becoming an adult, but remain overlooked in PG interventions. Investments during adolescence have been shown to yield a "triple dividend": improving well-being in the present, shaping future outcomes, and delivering intergenerational benefits (Patton et al., 2016). The 2024 Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing highlights the outsized returns of adolescent-targeted interventions across domains like education, health, and labor market outcomes. For instance, keeping girls in school is linked to delayed marriage and childbearing, improved maternal and child health, and increased lifetime earnings (Wodon et al., 2018). Providing already-married adolescents with livelihood opportunities often results in their return to school later in life and improved outcomes for their children. Similarly, enhancing psychosocial assets like self-efficacy, aspirations, and decision-making has been found to reduce exposure to violence, boost labor market readiness, and increase resilience to shocks (Patton et al., 2016). Despite this evidence, most PG programs do not tailor delivery for adolescent participants, nor evaluate outcomes relevant to their development.

In Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, Mercy Corps adapted core elements of the PG model through the Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods + Health (GIRL-H) program, targeting adolescent girls and boys—including both married and unmarried participants, and some already parenting. The program aimed to strengthen well-being, agency, and economic resilience by combining Safe Space life skills sessions with transitional pathways to education and livelihoods. Participants engaged for approximately nine months, including six months of Safe Space sessions. At month four, an assessment helped align individual aspirations with appropriate livelihood or educational pathways.

A mixed-methods, quasi-experimental impact evaluation found statistically significant improvements in life skills, financial literacy, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge (IPSOS, 2024). Quantitative data showed average life skills index[1] gains of 2.22 (Kenya), 4.04 (Uganda), and 3.53 (Nigeria), supported by qualitative evidence of improved saving and budgeting practices, increased business activity, and enhanced SRH awareness (Ibid).

At the same time, the evaluation found limited quantitative impacts on psychosocial well-being and empowerment indicators related to participants' social connectedness, locus of control, and gender norms. Qualitative findings, however, pointed to greater self-confidence, peer support, and improved relationships with peers, parents, and community members. The short duration of engagement, coupled with entrenched social norms, may have limited the depth of changes in these areas. The evaluation showcased the importance of longer timelines and community-wide approaches to shift gender attitudes and sustain gains.

Looking ahead, GIRL-H is scaling core components that demonstrated significant results—including life skills, financial literacy, SRH education, and business development—and refining the curricula based on learning across contexts. Key adaptations include:

- Extending program duration to reinforce outcomes and deepen gender norm change;

- Ensuring locally adapted curricula and localized delivery;

- Strengthening measurement of psychosocial outcomes, using qualitative and participatory approaches more closely aligned to the program model.

These insights reinforce the potential of tailored, adolescent-focused PG models and the need for integrated, locally embedded approaches that strengthen enabling environments and support sustained transitions out of poverty.

Edward Ahonobadha / Mercy Corps - South Sudan

---

1   The life skills index combines measures across multiple areas: e.g. economic empowerment, goal setting and agency, safety from violence, skills and training, access to information or training, and support availability. with higher scores indicating stronger capabilities across all themes. Respondents can receive a maximum score of 74, with higher scores indicating stronger capabilities and/or access.

While gains in income, consumption, assets, and savings are central to the PG approach, they may be insufficient on their own to support sustained pathways out of extreme poverty—particularly for participants facing structural and social constraints. For some, progress may also depend on improved caregiving practices, re-engagement with education, strengthened psychosocial well-being, or safer access to essential services. Supporting such outcomes may require PG programs to adapt who they target, how they sequence support, and expand the metrics that define whether an individual or household have graduated from poverty. It may also call for revisiting core assumptions about what drives poverty and what readiness for support looks like for different program participants. A more inclusive approach, grounded in locally relevant definitions of vulnerability, may benefit from greater flexibility in timelines, stronger cross-sectoral linkages, and more diverse indicators of progress.

These considerations raise several areas for further exploration. Targeting methods may benefit from greater contextualization to identify those most constrained by caregiving burdens, social marginalization, displacement, or age-specific vulnerabilities. In many settings, conventional poverty metrics risk overlooking those who are least visible in household-level data. More learning is also needed on how to sequence and tailor PG components to match participants' life stage, capacities, and constraints—particularly for adolescents, caregivers, or those affected by trauma.

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Kenya

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Uganda

Evaluation frameworks could also evolve to better capture the outcomes that matter most in participants' lives. Psychosocial well-being, educational participation, caregiving practices, and access to essential services often underpin sustained poverty reduction, especially for groups facing structural constraints. Yet these dimensions remain under-evaluated. Expanding evaluation frameworks to include these dimensions, alongside disaggregated data by gender, age, and displacement status, can provide a clearer picture of who benefits, how, and under what conditions.

Mercy Corps and its partners are engaging these questions through targeted pilots, expanded monitoring, and contextual adaptations. The aim is to build on the economic foundations of PG while testing and refining approaches that reflect the diverse and inclusive pathways through which individuals and households move out of extreme poverty.

OPPORTUNITY

#3 IMPROVING NUTRITION AND SUSTAINING FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES THROUGH POVERTY GRADUATION MODELS

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- PG programs reliably improve income, consumption, and savings—critical foundations for food security—by increasing household purchasing power, enabling consumption smoothing during lean periods, and reducing reliance on negative coping strategies.

- Food security and nutrition outcomes have less consistent positive effects, are more susceptible to shocks, and are less frequently measured in PG programs. While many programs track dietary diversity, few assess anthropometric or maternal-child nutrition outcomes, limiting insight into nutrition impacts.

- Nutrition-sensitive PG models hold promise to address these gaps. Such programs include cross-sector linkages with health, water and sanitation, and social protection services; strengthen alignment with local food systems; and adapt targeting and delivery to better reflect nutritional vulnerability and caregiving dynamics.

- Mercy Corps and its partners are actively testing program adaptations, such as through the Nawiri program in Kenya, to better understand if nutrition-sensitive PG approaches can more effectively support sustained improvements in food security and nutrition in fragile contexts.

PG models have consistently demonstrated strong gains in core economic outcomes—such as income, consumption, and savings. However, evidence on food security is more mixed, and nutrition outcomes remain limited and underexplored. In J-PAL's 2023 review, while 16 out of 19 studies reported income gains and 15 noted improvements in consumption, only 9 found significant improvements in food security (out of the 14 that measured it). These results suggest that while PG can enhance household economic capacity, translating these gains into improved food security and nutrition may require additional investments and design adaptations.

Nutrition outcomes, in particular, are infrequently measured and inconsistently integrated into PG programs. Most evaluations focus on food consumption or dietary diversity, with few collecting anthropometric data or assessing child and maternal nutrition. When nutrition is measured, impacts tend to be modest and secondary to economic indicators. This gap is notable given the well-established links between nutrition, cognitive development, and lifetime productivity. Malnutrition is estimated to cost developing countries 3–16% of GDP (Hoddinott 2016), and rising stunting rates in parts of Africa point to escalating costs. Improved nutrition is associated with better lifetime educational attainment and labor market outcomes, offering a critical—yet underutilized—pathway for enhancing the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of PG models (Alderman et al., 2006).

While food insecurity and malnutrition are often caused by poverty—stemming from limited income and access to productive resources—they also reinforce it by undermining physical health, cognitive development, and labor productivity (Hoddinott et al., 2013). These effects can accumulate over time, especially for children and adolescents, constraining educational opportunity, earnings potential, and household resilience to future shocks. In fragile or crisis-affected settings, persistent food insecurity can also lead to harmful coping strategies and reduced capacity to invest in long-term well-being. Addressing food security and nutrition gaps is therefore not just a matter of meeting immediate needs—it may be foundational to achieving sustained poverty reduction.

These findings highlight a clear opportunity: with deliberate integration of food security and nutrition objectives, PG models could contribute more directly to long-term human capital development and resilience. Achieving this will require more than technical add-ons—it calls for adapted targeting, sequencing, and delivery models that reflect nutritional vulnerabilities and caregiving roles, particularly in fragile settings. Several programs are already testing such adaptations. In Uganda, AVSI's *Graduating to Resilience* program has integrated nutrition-sensitive elements, such as home gardening and behavior change communication, into PG programming. Preliminary results show improvements in savings, income, and dietary practices, though no significant effects on anthropometric measures of child growth have been observed to date (Brune et al., 2023). These findings point to promising directions but also underscore the need for continued learning on how best to support nutritional gains through PG.

The Nawiri program in northern Kenya offers emerging insights into how PG approaches can be adapted to more directly address nutrition. In partnership with BOMA, Mercy Corps piloted and iterated on the REAP for Nutrition (R4N) models as a nutrition-sensitive adaptation of PG programming in Samburu and Turkana counties. R4N has evolved significantly across cohorts—shaped by real-time learning and monitoring data.

The pilot integrated standard PG components—coaching, savings groups, and asset transfers—with nutrition-specific elements such as Behavior Change Communication, household nutrition planning, and targeting based on household malnutrition prevalence. PG-enterprise livelihood strategies were iteratively adapted to catalyze more nutritious local food systems—both to generate income and to strengthen household diets. This reflects a growing recognition that improved nutrition depends not only on increased purchasing power, but also how food is produced, made accessible, affordable and acceptable within local economies—underscoring the importance of integrating nutritious food systems into PG design and delivery.

A mixed-methods evaluation—including baseline and endline surveys, anthropometric measurement, and qualitative interviews—documented gains in household income, productive assets, and caregiver nutrition knowledge (Mercy Corps and Catholic Relief Services, 2023). However, improvements in child nutrition were limited and inconsistent. Increases in dietary diversity did not always translate into reductions in wasting, due to persistent constraints including caregiving burdens, intra-household food allocation dynamics, weak water, sanitation and health service access (WASH), and the short duration of support (Ibid).

Based on these findings, Nawiri is prioritizing several adaptations:

- Extending program duration to better support sustained nutritional and economic outcomes;

- Strengthening cross-sector linkages with health, WASH, and social protection systems;

- More directly addressing gendered caregiving responsibilities and time constraints;

- Embedding local food system analysis into both program design and evaluation frameworks.

The Nawiri experience underscores the importance—and complexity—of integrating nutrition into PG programming. It also illustrates the value of iterative design and contextual adaptation: advancing nutrition outcomes in fragile settings will likely require not just technical add-ons, but closer alignment between livelihood strategies, food systems, and the broader social and service environment in which households live.

To more effectively support sustained poverty reduction, PG programs may need to more deliberately integrate food security and nutrition objectives into program design, targeting, and evaluation. This includes aligning interventions with local food systems, addressing caregiving burdens, and ensuring cross-sector linkages with health, WASH, and social protection services. Evaluation frameworks should be expanded to better capture nutrition-related impacts including anthropometric and caregiving indicators alongside economic measures.

Mercy Corps and its partners are actively working to address these questions. Through pilots like Nawiri, we are assessing which program components and delivery models are most effective for supporting sustained food security and nutrition gains in fragile contexts. These efforts aim to build on the economic foundations of Poverty Graduation, while ensuring the approach contributes more holistically to sustained improvements in food security and nutrition.

OPPORTUNITY

#4 COMPLEMENTING POVERTY GRADUATION WITH RISK-INFORMED PROGRAMMING

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- PG impacts in relatively stable contexts have proven to be durable, generally remaining strong at three and even seven years post-intervention.

- The connection between PG effectiveness, external shocks, and household resilience has not been extensively studied. This will become more critical as PG is increasingly used in fragile contexts.

- There are opportunities for risk-informed components—such as climate-resilient livelihoods, financial preparedness, conflict sensitivity and access to early warning systems— to strengthen PG outcomes and reduce reversals during crises. PG may also be incorporated as one component of a larger set of systems-based resilience activities, providing support to communities and marginalized groups beyond the graduates alone.

- Mercy Corps and our partners are exploring when and how to effectively adapt and complement core PG activities with a greater focus on resilience to protect investments made by participants and donors through our DREAMS, Nawiri, and GAINS programs.

Poverty Graduation programs have traditionally focused on helping households reach economic self-reliance, with long-term gains in income and assets forming the basis of the approach's cost-effectiveness. However, in settings affected by recurring climate and conflict shocks, there is growing concern that household-level gains may not be sufficient to withstand major disruptions – especially when shocks are severe enough that household income and assets provide little buffer. In such cases, program gains may be eroded, with vulnerable participants sliding back into poverty, and requiring renewed support.

Evidence on how PG holds up in the face of shocks remains limited and mixed. Some studies underscore the vulnerability of program gains to external stressors. In BRAC's Honduras program, for example, disease wiped out poultry provided through PG activities, destroying progress made through the investment (Banerjee et al., 2015). In 2019 in Malawi, flooding reduced the food security of PG participants affected, but it did not set them back completely. By two years after the program, the gap between those affected and unaffected by the floods had closed (Bedi et al., 2022). Other studies have shown more durable results: an IFPRI research team found that a PG program, building on Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program, partially mitigated drought's negative impact on food security and livestock holdings for participating programs (Hirvonen et al., 2023). Critically, it also completely prevented an increase in inter-partner violence experienced by control households (Ibid). In Uganda and Kenya, a Village Enterprise program ran during COVID-19, and while most participants were directly affected by the pandemic, their gains in income and consumption were equal to unaffected households (Gallardo et al., 2021).

LESSONS FROM THE DREAMS AND NAWIRI PROGRAMS: CLIMATE PREPARATION AND PG

Through the DREAMS program in Uganda and Ethiopia, Mercy Corps and Village Enterprise are combining PG with smart subsidies and climate-resilient value chains to promote drought-resistant crops, climate-smart seeds, and good agronomical practices to prepare for ever more variable weather. Preliminary data from DREAMS assessments indicate improved savings, increased investment in productive assets, and greater confidence in managing economic uncertainty (Village Enterprise & Mercy Corps, 2024, and Refugee Self Reliance Initiative, 2024).

In Kenya, Mercy Corps and BOMA implemented an enhanced Poverty Graduation model during the 2021–2023 drought through the Nawiri program, layering it onto emergency cash transfers to build household and community resilience beyond short-term coping. Coaching, mentoring, and enterprise development support were tailored to drought-affected conditions and local food system needs. Women's PG groups identified gaps in local food access and responded by selling dried vegetables and cereals at affordable prices within their communities. They also negotiated bulk purchases with commodity suppliers to reduce costs for local households. In areas near rivers, PG groups produced fast-germinating crops and sold them to neighboring villages, improving both availability and affordability of nutritious foods during a time of scarcity. By embedding resilience and adaptability into the PG design, Nawiri aimed to strengthen not only participant livelihoods but also food access for surrounding communities and markets.

There is further need to systematically examine when and how PG participation enhances household resilience, how different types of shocks – idiosyncratic versus covariate, and recurrent versus discrete – influence PG's effectiveness. This understanding will allow implementers to better optimize program design for shock-prone settings. For example, as displaced populations are often resettled to areas vulnerable to climate change, understanding the profile of climate risks can be adopted as a standard practice (Refugee Self Reliance Initiative, 2024).

Ongoing programming by Mercy Corps and our partners presents an opportunity to generate evidence on how PG models can be adapted to better account for risks and volatility. Areas for exploration include selection of livelihood activities that are less vulnerable to economic or climate shocks, the incorporation of contingency planning into coaching, and the integration of PG programs with safety nets and early warning systems. Many of these resilience-building measures are explicitly tied to market systems strengthening opportunities which aim to ensure that public and private sector actors deliver services that enhance household and community resilience. Designing for resilience may also require adapting PG delivery to better anticipate volatility—by tracking risk exposure, embedding resilience-building activities within systems-strengthening efforts, and aligning with broader resilience and social protection strategies. Strengthening measurement and adaptation in these areas could help support more durable pathways out of poverty and reduce long-term reliance on safety nets and emergency aid in crisis-affected settings.

Ala Kheir for Mercy Corps - Sudan

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Kenya

Looking Ahead:
A Call to Learn, Adapt, & Invest

Mercy Corps' experience and the broader evidence base point to a clear takeaway: PG can be an effective tool for sustained poverty reduction in fragile and dynamic environments — especially when adapted to reflect the systemic barriers, risks, and opportunities that shape those contexts. In many of the places where Mercy Corps and our partners work, exclusion is not only a function of poverty but also of disrupted systems, restrictive social norms, and recurring shocks. In these settings, greater impact may lie in pairing individual support with efforts to strengthen the enabling environment.

Doing so requires continual learning and growing the evidence base that draws on rigorous impact evaluations, program assessments, and internal adaptations—employing research designs that center inclusion, sustainability, scale, and systems change. In closing, we highlight key questions and current efforts underway to address gaps across the four opportunity areas.

Market systems strengthening and integration: More evidence is needed on how thin and distorted markets with weak governance structures impact PG's effectiveness, and how pairing PG with systems strengthening activities can support continued business growth. In Uganda and Ethiopia, Mercy Corps and Village Enerprise are partnering with IDinsight on a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of this pairing, up to 2.5 years after completion. This study, and evaluations of similar programs like IRC's Re:Build in Kenya and Uganda, will shed more light on where the private sector can best be implemented into PG to strengthen outcomes for participants, and conditions required to sustain those outcomes. Beyond these RCTs, more research is needed to look beyond household-level outcomes, and to capture potential beneficial systems-level impacts such as learning and replication among non-PG households, crowding in of supportive businesses, and stronger relationships within market systems and specific value chains.

Adaptations for adolescents and other marginalized groups: While existing evidence shows that PG programs can yield economic gains, there is limited understanding of how well they reach and benefit individuals facing structural and social barriers—such as displacement, caregiving responsibilities, restrictive gender norms, and trauma. Few evaluations disaggregate outcomes by age, gender, or displacement status, and important outcomes like educational participation, caregiving practices, and access to services remain under-measured. Mercy Corps is working to address these gaps through programs such as GIRL-H and DREAMS, which test adaptations in delivery, sequencing, and measurement to support more inclusive and sustained pathways out of poverty.

Improved nutrition and sustained food security: Evidence remains limited on how PG models can be adapted to achieve nutrition and food security outcomes. More research is needed on effective adaptations that target nutritional and food security vulnerability, support nutrition-sensitive enterprises, and integrate behavior change communication and service linkages into the Poverty Graduation package. In Kenya's nutritionally vulnerable counties of Samburu and Turkana, the Nawiri program is testing such adaptations—including household nutrition planning, Behavior Change Communication, and livelihoods support designed to strengthen the local food systems. Early results point to the importance of aligning income generation with improved food availability, affordability, and caregiving practices. Ongoing evaluation will explore how these adaptations can support durable improvements in maternal and child nutrition, and what programmatic features are most critical to success.

Risk-informed programming: As climate shocks, conflict, and economic volatility increasingly shape the environments where PG is implemented, there is a growing need to understand how this approach contributes to resilience at the system, community, household, and individual levels. Strengthening this evidence base will require improved measurement, alongside the integration of risk-informed tools such as early warning systems, insurance, and climate information services. Mercy Corps and its partners are actively piloting methods to assess resilience outcomes and are exploring how PG can serve as a platform for climate-adapted livelihoods and adaptive social protection. Looking ahead, further efforts will focus on embedding risk reduction and recovery into PG programming—ensuring it not only drives growth but also helps safeguard progress when shocks occur.

Mercy Corps is committed to generating practical insights from Poverty Graduation programming in fragile, shock-affected, and thin-market environments. Closing the gap between what PG has achieved to date and what it could offer in the most fragile contexts where the world's poorest increasingly reside will require ongoing collaboration, evaluation, and knowledge-sharing. By continuing to test, refine, and document PG adaptations in diverse contexts, we hope to contribute to the next generation of PG programs capable of strengthening resilience and enabling sustained poverty reduction in the world's most challenging settings.

Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps - Uganda

Works Consulted

Poverty Graduation Literature

Angelucci, M., Heath, R., and Noble, E. 2023. Multifaceted programs targeting women in fragile settings: Evidence from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Assaad, R., Osman, A., Pariente, W., and Valente, C. 2022. Graduating the ultra-poor in Egypt.

Athias, D., and Kidd, St. 2019. The Effectiveness of the Graduation Approach: What does the evidence tell us?

Bandiera, O., Burgess, R., Das, N. C., Gulesci, S., Rasul, I., Shams, R., and Sulaiman, M. 2012. Asset Transfer Programme for the Ultra Poor: A Randomized Control Trial Evaluation.

Bandiera, O., Burgess, R., Das, N. C., Gulesci, S., Rasul, I., and Sulaiman, M. 2014. The Impact of a One-off Transfer of Assets and Skills on the Occupational Choices of Low-income Women in Bangladesh.

Bandiera, O., Burgess, R., Das, N. C,, Gulesci, S., Rasul, I., and Sulaiman, M. 2016. Labor Markets and Poverty in Village Economies. 2016

Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., and Sharma, G. 2021. Long-term effects of the Targeting the Ultra Poor program.

Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., Goldberg, N., Karlan, D., Osei, R., Pariente, W., Shapiro, J., Thuysbaert, B., Trachtman, H., and Udry, C. 2014. Graduating the Ultra-Poor in Ghana.

Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., Goldberg, N., Karlan, D., Osei, R., Parienté, W., Shapiro, J., Thuysbaert, B., and Udry, C. 2015. A multifaceted program causes lasting progress for the very poor: Evidence from six countries.

Barker, N., 2020. The long-run impacts of the graduation program in Ethiopia and Ghana.

Barker, N., Bryan, G., Karlan, D., Ofori-Atta, A., and Udry, C. 2021. Mental health therapy as a core strategy for increasing human capital: Evidence from Ghana.

Bauchet, J., Morduch, J., Ravi, S. 2015. Failure vs. displacement: Why an innovative anti-poverty program showed no net impact in South India.

Bedi, T. 2022. Ultra-poor graduation and environmental shocks: Evidence from the 2019 Malawian floods.

Bedi, T., and King, S. 2020. Concern's graduation programme in Malawi (2017–2021): Report on the effects of Cyclone Idai.

Bedoya, G., Coville, A., Haushofer, J., Isaqzadeh, M., and Shapiro, J. P. 2019. No Household Left Behind: Afghanistan Targeting the Ultra Poor Impact Evaluation.

Bernard, T., Dercon S., Orkin K., and Taffesse A. 2014. The Future in Mind: Aspirations and Forward-Looking Behaviour in Rural Ethiopia.

Blattman, C., Green, E., Jamison, J., Lehmann, M., and Annan, J. 2016. The returns to microenterprise support among the ultra-poor: A field experiment in postwar Uganda.

Bossuroy, T., Goldstein, M., Karimou, B., Karlan, D., Kazianga, H., Parienté, W., Premand, P., Thomas, C., Udry, C., Vaillant, J., and Wright, K. 2022. Tackling psychosocial and capital constraints to alleviate poverty.

Bossuroy, T., and Premand, P. 2021. Pathways out of extreme poverty? The cost-effectiveness of productive inclusion measures in Sahelian safety nets.

Brune, L., Goldberg, N., Karlan, D., Parkerson, D., and Udry, C. 2024. The Impact of a Graduation Program on Livelihoods in Refugee and Host Communities in Uganda.

Campos, F., Frese, M., Goldstein, M., Iacovone, L., Johnson, H., McKenzie, D. and Mensmann, M. 2017. Teaching personal initiative beats traditional training in boosting small business in West Africa.

Carter, M., and Barrett, C. 2006. The economics of poverty traps and persistent poverty: An asset-based approach.

Carter, M., Jensen, N., and Zheng, G. 2022. Evidence Insight: Clearing Pathways to Prosperity with a Livelihood Building Program in Kenya. USAID: Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Markets, Risk and Resilience.

Carter, M., Zheng, D., and Jensen, N. 2022. Clearing pathways to prosperity with a livelihood building program in Kenya.

Emran, M. S., Robano, V., and Smith, S. 2009. Assessing the Frontiers of Ultra-Poverty Reduction: Evidence from CFPR/TUP.

Godfrey-Wood, R. and Flower, B. 2017. Does Guaranteed employment promote resilience to climate change? The case of India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Heath, R., and Noble, E. 2020. Social and economic impacts of a gendered graduation approach in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Heil, A., Sulaiman, M., Bandiera, O. and Burgess, R. 2024. Graduation: CEPR Discussion Paper DP19356.

Hirvonen, K., Gilligan, D., Leight, J., Tambet, H., and Villa, V. 2023. Do ultra-poor graduation programs build resilience against droughts? Evidence from rural Ethiopia.

Ipsos Africa Centre for Development Research & Evaluation. 2024. Girls Improving Resilience Through Livelihoods + Health (GIRL-H) Program Evaluation Report. Prepared for Mercy Corps.

Gallardo, J. Kananu, W., Lazicky, C., McManus, J., and Njogu-Ndongwe, F. 2021. Village Enterprise Development Impact Bond Evaluation Findings.

J-PAL. 2023. Building stable livelihoods for low-income households.

Kabeer, N. 2018. Randomized control trials and qualitative evaluations of a multifaceted program for women in extreme poverty: Empirical findings and methodological reflections.

Leight, J., Alderman, H., Gilligan, D., Hidrobo, M., and Mulford, M. 2023. Can a light-touch graduation model enhance livelihood outcomes? Evidence from Ethiopia.

Mercy Corps. 2024. Bridging Poverty Graduation and Market Systems Development.

Mercy Corps. 2025. Delivering Resilient Enterprises and Market Systems in Support of Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda: DREAMS' impact at three years.

Mercy Corps. 2024. Rural Entrepreneur Access Project (REAP) For Nutrition (R4N) Cohort 1 Endline Evaluation Report, Turkana and Samburu.

Mercy Corps and Catholic Relief Services. 2023. Improving Nutrition with the Graduation Approach: A USAID Technical Learning Brief.

Misha, F., Raza, W., Ara, J., & Van de Poel, E. 2014. How Far Does a Big Push Really Push?

Moreno Sánchez, R. del P., Maldonado, J. H., Melo, L. F., and Sanchez, C. 2021. Empoderamiento de mujeres participantes del programa de alivio a la pobreza Emprendiendo una Vida Mejor en Honduras: análisis cualitativo (Empowerment of women beneficiaries of a poverty-alleviation program in Honduras: A qualitative analysis).

Nguyen, A., Lasater, M., Lee, C., Mallawaarachchi, I., Joshua, K., Bassett, L., and Gelsdorf, K. 2023. Psychosocial support interventions in the context of forced displacement: A systematic review and meta-analysis.

O'Brien, C., Scott, Z., Smith, G., Barca, V., Kardan, A., Holmes, R., Watson, C., and Congrave, J. 2018. Shock-responsive social protection systems research: Synthesis report.

Pople, A., Hill, R., and Dercon, S., et. al. 2021. Anticipatory cash transfers in climate disaster response.

Premand, P., and Stoeffler, Q. 2020. Do cash transfers foster resilience? Evidence from rural Niger.

Rahman, A., and Bandiera, O. 2021. COVID-19 vs. UPG: Evidence from the 2007 cohort in Bangladesh.

Sedlmayr, R., Shah, A., Sulaiman, M. 2020. Poverty impacts of alternative transfer-based approaches.

World Bank. 2013. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) integrating disaster and climate risk management: Case study.

Other referenced literature

Albu, M. and Osorio-Cortes, L. 2021. Evidence review: The results achieved by programmes using a market systems approach. BEAM Exchange.

Alderman, H., Hoddinott, J., & Kinsey, B. 2006. Long-term consequences of early childhood malnutrition.

Arévalo, I., Kaffenberger, M., and de Montesquiou, A. 2018. State of the Sector. Partnership for Economic Inclusion.

Beltramo, T., Nimoh, F., Megan O'Brien, M., and Sequeira, S. 2023. The Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees Improves When Refugees and Hosts Are More Financially Secure. UNHCR.

Bernagros, A., Kirton, A., and Toussaint, N. 2022. Considerations for Integrating the Graduation Approach within Resilience Food Security Activities. USAID: Implementer-led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) Activity.

BRAC, Graduation Overview. 2021

de Montesquiou, A., and Hashemi, S. M. 2011. Reaching the Poorest: Lessons from the Graduation Model. CGAP.

de Montesquiou, A., Hashemi, S., and Sheldon, T. M. 2018. From Extreme Poverty to Sustainable Livelihoods A Technical Guide to the Graduation Approach. Partnership for Economic Inclusion.

DFAT's Market Development Facility (MDF), Reaching the poorest: Market Systems Development (MSD), social protection & graduation approaches. 2019

Gollin, M., de Miranda, C., Muriuki, T., and Commins, S. 2023. Designing and Delivering Government-Led Graduation Programs for People in Extreme Poverty. World Bank: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Hoddinott, J. 2016. The economics of reducing malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Hoddinott, J., Alderman, H., Behrman, J. R., Haddad, L., & Horton, S. .2013. The economic rationale for investing in stunting reduction.

Patton, G.C., Sawyer, S.M., Santelli, J.S., et al. 2016. Our future: a Lancet Commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. Lancet.

Pozuelo, Julia R., Raphael Bradenbrink, Maria Flinder Stierna, and Olivier Sterck. 2023. Depression, Violence and Socioeconomic Outcomes among Refugees in East Africa: Evidence from a Multicountry Representative Survey.

Wodon, Q., Male, C., Montenegro, C., Nguyen, H., and Onagoruwa, A. 2018, Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage: A Priority for Africa. World Bank.

CONTACT

JEEYON KIM
Director of Research - Food Security | Research & Learning
jeeyonkim@mercycorps.org

DAN HUDNER
Senior Researcher - Economic Opportunities | Research & Learning
dhudner@mercycorps.org

OLGA PETRYNIAK
Senior Director - Africa Resilience Programs
opetryniak@mercycorps.org

About Mercy Corps
Mercy Corps is a leading global organization
powered by the belief that a better world is possible.
In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries
around the world, we partner to put bold solutions
into action—helping people triumph over adversity
and build stronger communities from within.
Now, and for the future.

**MERCY
CORPS**

Global Headquarters
1111 19th St NW #650
Washington, DC 20036
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org

European Headquarters
40 Sciences
Edinburgh EH9 1NJ
Scotland, UK
+44.131.662.5160
mercycorps.org.uk