

EVALUATING GRADUATION IN INDIA

Findings from a quasi-experimental evaluation in West Bengal



In 2012, the Ford Foundation supported Trickle Up, together with our local partner, Jamgoria Sevabrata, to conduct a three-year Graduation project with 600 households living in extreme poverty in West Bengal, India. The project sought to enable women participants and their households to develop the skills, resources and connections to grow and sustain livelihoods that move and keep them out of extreme poverty. What follows is a summary of key results and learning from a quasi-experimental evaluation. For the full evaluation report, please visit trickleup.org.



THE GRADUATION APPROACH

The project featured the following Graduation components:

- Participant selection through participatory wealth ranking and household-level verification
- Self-help savings and credit groups (SHG) formation to promote financial and social inclusion
- Livelihood planning and training
- Seed capital grant transfer of Rs. 11,280 (\$205)
- Regular coaching and monitoring
- Consumption support for two months of the first lean season
- Monthly visits by health workers

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The evaluation aimed to estimate the impact of our Graduation program in West Bengal relative to a comparison group in the same communities. The comparison group consisted of households that were identified as among the poorest through the selection process, but were disqualified from program participation after household-level verification, largely due to having more land or other assets. We utilized difference-in-difference to assess changes in outcomes between the participant and comparison groups over the three-year project, and drew on monitoring data and a qualitative assessment.

Trickle Up was founded in 1979 and works in India, Central America and West Africa to support the most vulnerable populations to create a sustainable pathway out of extreme poverty through livelihood development programming rooted in the Graduation Approach. Trickle Up also provides technical assistance to other organizations to integrate the Graduation Approach into their programs and policies, often to reach a poorer population.

Jamgoria Sevabrata is a rural development organization that was established in 1986 in India to promote livelihood opportunities for poor and marginalized communities through land and water management, credit linkage with banks, and the promotion of income-generating activities.

AUTHORS: Ameneé Siahpush, Jo Sanson & Matthew Bombyk

STRATEGIC ADVISOR: Syed M. Hashemi, Senior Advisor, Graduating the Poor Initiative, CGAP

PROGRAM FINDINGS

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Participant households increased their total annual income by an average of Rs. 29,000 (\$527), an estimated Rs. 11,300 (\$205) of which can be attributed to the program.

Participant households started with a slightly lower annual income than the comparison group, yet by the end of the project, their income was nearly 25% higher. This increase of Rs. 29,000 (\$527) is primarily due to agriculture, small business, and livestock income, which were the activities promoted by the project. This compares to an increase of Rs. 17,700 (\$322) for the comparison group. Qualitative assessment and monitoring data suggest positive spillover effects on the community, as many successful agricultural practices adopted by participants were replicated by members of the comparison group. This implies that the true estimated project impact was likely even greater.

FOOD SECURITY

Participant households significantly reduced the frequency of food insecurity. An estimated decrease of 22 percentage points can be attributed to the program.

The number of participant households who reported sometimes or often not having enough to eat over the past year reduced from 45% at baseline to only 1% of households at endline. This decrease is significantly different from the decrease of 22 percentage points experienced by the comparison group. Participants have experienced a substantial increase in the quantity and quality of food for their households, which they attribute to an increase in income from their activities, the expansion or initiation of cultivation, the addition of kitchen gardens, or increased access to government food subsidy programs.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Participants significantly increased their engagement in collective action. An estimated increase of 49 percentage points can be attributed to the program.

Participants are encouraged to engage in collective actions through their SHGs, including advocating for infrastructure improvements from the government or addressing gender-based injustices such as domestic violence. The number of participant households that engaged in collective action increased from 1% at baseline to 92%, for a total increase of 91 percentage points. While the comparison group also increased by 42 percentage points, the difference in change between the two groups was highly significant. Participant SHGs often involved other community members in their collective action, which helps to explain the large increase for the comparison group.

HOUSEHOLD ASSETS

Participant households increased the total average value of household, land, and livestock assets by Rs. 34,000 (\$618), an estimated Rs. 14,000 (\$254) of which can be attributed to the program.

The total average value of assets (excluding savings) increased from approximately Rs. 4,000 (\$73) to Rs. 38,000 (\$691) for participant households. This increase is significantly greater than the comparison group members, who increased by an average of Rs. 20,000 (\$364) in asset value. Participants prioritized investment in productive assets, such as livestock or motor irrigation pumps, to support their livelihood activities.

LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS

This project was instrumental in helping Trickle Up to launch partnerships with the Jharkhand and Odisha state branches of the Indian government's National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). The integration of Graduation into large scale social assistance and poverty alleviation programs is critical in order to have a significant impact on extreme poverty, and with this new phase comes further questions and challenges. As we prepare for these scale opportunities, Trickle Up has identified a number of key lessons from our evaluation and experiences to date that will inform our government partnerships and influence our research agenda.

Promote strategic linkages to government programs during the livelihood planning process.

We found noteworthy innovations when field agents went beyond supporting participants to access employment and other benefits, by also strategically integrating access to government programs for community infrastructure (e.g. irrigation) into the livelihood planning phase. This allows staff to increase the menu and profitability of livelihood activities for participants, which may otherwise be deemed unfeasible without certain types of infrastructure.

Capitalize on the role of self-help groups as a foundation for development.

SHGs appear to play an important role in building and sustaining the social and financial capabilities of participants. However, the sustainability of SHGs is not guaranteed after the program ends. Trickle Up is exploring if grouping SHGs into federations may strengthen their institutional capacity in the long term and promote their ability to leverage other government services and programs.

Strengthen the enabling environment for the poorest through broader community engagement.

Through this project, we identified a need for interventions with an additional target population: households that are barely above the threshold of extreme poverty and who are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, such as the comparison group. We are currently exploring the impact of a "lighter" Graduation Approach (specifically, the elimination of the grant transfer) with these households. Working with both groups allows us to reach a significantly larger number of participants and strengthens our advocacy platform.

Enhance the cost-effectiveness and scalability of the program.

Coaching appears to have been critical for reinforcing training messages and providing motivation for participants; however, we also know that coaching is the most challenging component to scale and constitutes a significant program cost. We will test different configurations of delivering coaching, such as through community resource people, who are women from the community who can serve as advocates and resources for program participants.

For the full evaluation report, including how our findings align with those from the randomized control trials on the six Graduation pilots, please visit trickleup.org.



trickleup

India Regional Office

4/2 Orient Row, Park Circus
Kolkata 700017 INDIA
+91-33-2289-2708

New York Headquarters

104 W 27th Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10001 USA
+1-212-255-9980 / info@trickleup.org