The Challenge

Poverty is a complex issue, without a single, simple solution. A family or a community will struggle to lift itself out of poverty if they’re dealing with multiple problems and aren’t equipped to cope. Lack of education, training, information, and capital leave the extremely poor at an extreme disadvantage when it comes to raising their standard of living.

Our Approach

Concern recognizes the multidimensional nature of extreme poverty. As the name suggests, our Graduation program is designed to “graduate” families out of extreme poverty.

The program offers an integrated and intensive package of support over a period of 18 months to 3 years. This package of support, which targets extremely poor households, is usually sequenced, beginning with business coaching. Cash transfers and skills training follow, and participants eventually gain access to capital grants, low interest loans or fixed assets.

The goal of this package is to help families build sustainable livelihoods, one by one, and based on each individual family’s skills and passions. Not only does it move people above a certain threshold of wealth, but it also helps them exit extreme poverty in a sustainable fashion. Independent research has shown that one of the key factors in the success of this model is regular mentorship and monitoring — Concern teams spend much of their time on the highways and byways, listening, advising, and encouraging.

Graduation by the Numbers

783 million people live below the international poverty line of $1.90 a day

Even with a job, 8% of the world’s workers and their families still live in extreme poverty

Over the last 20 years in Madagascar, the number of people in extreme poverty increased almost one-for-one with the total population

Read more about our Graduation program: concernusa.org/graduation
The Graduation Program

Graduation’s holistic approach helps families identify their interests and skills so they can find meaningful ways to sustainably “graduate” out of poverty.

In 2018, over 3,000 households in Burundi and a further 1,300 in Rwanda were supported to learn a range of skills, gain knowledge, and take part in activities that increase their capacity to earn a living and move out of poverty and hunger.

“I used to sleep hungry and my children would not go to school... Now, my life has changed in so many ways.”
— Stawa James, Malawi

As a girl, Stawa wasn’t able to attend school — she didn’t have any clothes to wear. Since joining Concern’s Graduation program, Stawa was trained in conservation agriculture and is now able to feed her family 3 meals a day and make a profit. She plans to extend her farm and business further. All of her children are also enjoying the benefits of an education — her eldest daughter plans to study medicine.

In Malawi, 25% of the population are defined as “ultra-poor,” largely due to climate-related shocks such as flood and drought.

Concern’s multidimensional Graduation approach has tackled some of the relevant issues in communities, including gender discrimination. In January 2017, we began a tailored 5-year program that fosters a community-wide approach to addressing problems that affect all poor people in a community, transforming thousands of lives and creating opportunities for Malawi’s next generation of young men and women.

Our Impact

In 2018, our Graduation program supported 3,000 households in Burundi

Over 23,190 Malawians reached through Graduation in 2018 alone

Supports UN Sustainable Development Goals including Decent Work and Economic Growth and No Poverty

Concern Worldwide is a global community of humanitarian professionals, individual donors, corporate partners, and supporters, who share a common vision of a world where no one lives in poverty, fear, or oppression. We believe everyone has the right to a decent standard of living, should have access to the opportunities and choices essential to a long, healthy, and creative life, and be treated with dignity and respect.