A Research Agenda for the Next Wave of Graduation Programs

Rarely has an antipoverty strategy been evaluated so thoroughly as the Graduation Approach, the holistic livelihood development program popularized by BRAC.

In 2006, CGAP and the Ford Foundation teamed up to determine whether BRAC’s Ultra-Poor Graduation Approach could be adapted successfully outside Bangladesh. They identified ten partners in eight countries around the world and, with much foresight, invested in an evaluation strategy that would provide an impressive body of evidence once these programs had completed nearly a decade later. Eight of the sites were evaluated with randomized evaluations which were complemented with rigorous qualitative research. Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) conducted seven of the randomized evaluations. We pooled the data from six of the randomized evaluations and published the results in Science (Banerjee et al. 2015).

The results showed positive impacts on every outcome we looked at, including income and revenues, total per-capita consumption, assets, food security, women’s empowerment, physical health, financial inclusion, mental health, total time spent working, and political involvement.

Today the World Bank’s Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI) counts 219 active economic inclusion programs implemented by governments and NGOs across 75 countries, and extending to new populations including the urban poor and refugees.

IPA has developed a Research Agenda for the Next Wave of Graduation Programs that focuses on unpacking the pieces of the multidimensional approach, optimizing component levels, and experimenting with variations to improve cost-effectiveness and enable scale.

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