

SONKE & CONCERN WORLDWIDE CONCEPT

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated 51.5% of people living below the poverty line, and 20.1% ranked as extremely poor (World Bank 2016/17). Concern Worldwide's organisational focus on extreme poverty recognises the multi-dimensionality of extreme poverty characterised by the lack of basic assets and the low return on these assets, inequality (particularly gender inequality), and risk and vulnerability.

In order to address the causes, maintainers and obstacles of extreme poverty, boost livelihoods and income, provide access to financial services, improve self-confidence and tackle social exclusion, Concern is implementing a modified Graduation programme. As well as including a multi-sectoral series of interventions (comprehensive targeting, cash transfers, skills training and coaching, saving and financial access, and asset transfers), this approach seeks to directly address harmful gender norms that affect people's abilities to lift themselves out of extreme poverty.

The gender transformative component of the programme, known as Umodzi, meaning 'united', engages couples to reflect upon and discuss issues such as gender norms, power, decision-making, budgeting, violence, positive parenting and healthy relationships. As part of a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) impact evaluation led by Concern and Trinity Impact Evaluation Unit at Trinity College Dublin, the programme is structured into three treatment arms:

- 1) Male household members as the primary recipients of the range of inputs
- 2) Female household members as the primary recipients of the range of inputs
- 3) Female household members as the primary recipients of the range of inputs plus the female and her partner/husband participate in 12 gender transformative dialogue sessions over 12 months.

The aim of this research is to better understand the intersectional barriers faced by women in escaping extreme poverty. It examines whether the sex of the Graduation programme recipient affects household decision-making, gender attitudes, food security and income, and additionally what effect the gender transformative dialogue sessions have on these outcomes.

Preparation for implementing Umodzi was supported by Sonke Gender Justice, with whom Concern has a global partnership that seeks to strengthen our capacity to implement gender transformative programming, including the attitudes of our own staff towards gender equality and their skills to work at community level on this issue.

This panel discussion, including representatives from Concern Malawi, Trinity College Dublin and Sonke, will provide an overview of the Graduation Model in Malawi, and a detailed description of the Umodzi component, including its inception, design, challenges and learnings. We will discuss the contribution of this research to the global evidence in this area and present preliminary qualitative findings.