

Assessment of Graduation

A Way Forward Brief by Judith Sandford

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Background

The Productive Safety Net Programme was launched in February 2005. It has been actively linked with Other Food Security Programmes (OFSP), particularly household packages through credit, since 2006. The Government of Ethiopia and its development partners intend that these combined programmes (under the umbrella of the Food Security Programme) will enable chronically food insecure households to improve their lives and, once they have achieved food sufficiency, to graduate from the PSNP.

In 2007, representatives from federal and regional food security offices and development partners met to discuss what process should be employed to identify those households who have achieved food sufficiency and can therefore graduate from the programme. A Graduation Guidance Note was developed as a consequence of this workshop and was rolled out to regions and woredas in 2008.

The assessment on which this brief is based provides a review of the experiences to-date of identifying households ready to exit the PSNP. The assessment was commissioned by the World Bank on behalf of the federal Food Security Programme Department (FSPD) and its development partners. There were three key components to the assessment:

1. Assess the system, processes and procedures that are currently being used to determine which households graduate from the PSNP;
2. Assess whether or not households graduated from the PSNP had achieved food sufficiency, and assess changes to their livelihoods since their graduation; and
3. Make recommendations to improve the PSNP graduation system

This brief summarises the key conclusions of the report and describes the key agreements reached with regards the way forward.

Conclusions

After an intensive burst of activity in late 2007 and early 2008 the PSNP graduation system has been established and has been used to manage the graduation process across the programme. Its development and use has required an intensive effort from programme implementers right from the top down to the bottom, to allow it to get this far. For a long time there was a lack of clarity on how to address graduation; but for the last two years the programme has been able to do exactly that.

The rules for managing graduation are set out in the Graduation Guidance Note. What this Assessment has shown is that these rules are not being accurately followed across the programme. There is local variation in almost every respect. What we do not currently have is a single system for managing graduation; in reality we have a framework which is being interpreted and applied differently in almost every location.

There are some positive reasons for this situation. The original process for developing the graduation guidance was not perfect. As a result, there some stakeholders lacked a belief that following the guidance would lead to an effective graduation process. Consequently, some of the departures from the guidance note reflected an active choice.

However there are also many less positive reasons why the guidance is not being followed. These relate to a lack of capacity to decide what should be done, a lack of process management and supervision, a lack of guidance material, a lack of training and support, and also a felt need to graduate people from the programme in order to meet graduation targets or demonstrate progress rather than to reflect their livelihood status.

Most graduates do report that their lives have improved over the course of their participation in the FSP. The majority of graduates report that 4-5 years ago they were struggling or not coping, and now state that they are 'doing OK' or 'doing well'. Households in these categories usually also report being able to meet food needs. However, such households may have to access additional income during the hungry season to meet needs. Better off graduates can often do this by selling crops, particularly cash-crops, those who report they are 'doing OK' often also report selling small stock.

Some graduate households continue to report that they are struggling or not coping. These households are more likely to report that they are not meeting their food needs (although some still state that they are) and tend to have lower asset holdings. They are also more likely to be engaged in labour activities to meet their food needs. This indicates that the current systems used to identify graduates do not consistently identify households who are food sufficient.

In summary, the process for assessing graduation has been established and is functioning, but it is not working in the best way it could. There is definite room for improvement. The following section outlines the necessary improvements that are suggested by the findings of the Graduation Assessment.

Way Forward

The key agreements presented in this section were reached during a 'Way Forward Retreat' and subsequent Steering Committee meeting. As such, these agreements reflect the views of the wider stakeholders (regional and federal government and donors), informed by the analysis presented by the Assessment Team. Seven key areas of agreement were reached:

1. Re-establishment of a single harmonised system across the programme
2. Target setting process is clear and effective
3. Criteria for assessing graduates are appropriate and effectively applied
4. The graduation process is effectively managed
5. Capacity, documentation and training enable effective performance of all stakeholders
6. The balance of incentives support graduation
7. Safeguards are rigorously met

They key agreements in each of these areas are discussed below:

Re-establishment of a single harmonised system

The Retreat agreed the need to re-establish a single harmonised system for identifying graduates across all areas covered by the GoE's Food Security Programme (and rejected a proposal to formalize a more fragmented system). However, in reaching this agreement the Retreat also stated that such a harmonised system should still enable locally relevant criteria and local conditions to form part of the assessment. How this would be addressed is stated in the section on criteria below.

The Retreat confirmed the need for federal guidance on how to undertake graduate identification. This federal guidance will incorporate all the key steps of the graduate identification process.

Target setting process is clear and effective

The Retreat agreed that there should be an absolute separation between target setting (how many households the GoE aspires will graduate from the PSNP) and the process of graduate identification. Targets are set to indicate the ambitions of the programme with the target setting process the first stage in identifying the resources necessary to achieve these ambitions. The graduate identification process will be based solely on the evidence that households have achieved food sufficiency and are able to thrive and survive without PSNP support, and will not be influenced by the existence of these targets.

If there are any differences between the numbers actually graduating and the targets, the Retreat agreed these differences will be addressed through increased efforts to create the conditions to enable graduation; whether through increased resourcing, improved programme performance or other efforts. Differences will not be addressed through the graduate identification process.

The subsequent Steering Committee meeting agreed that the targets stated in the Food Security Programme document will form the basis of targets used in the programme. The target expressed in this document is that 80% of public works clients will graduate by 2014. However, this 80% target is a national target and not all woredas are expected to have a target for 80% graduation, some woredas may be below the target while others may exceed it.

Woredas will be requested to identify development targets for graduation. These targets will be based on evidence of what is realistic given the resources and conditions available in the specific woreda. Woredas will be provided with clear guidance on how to develop these targets and what types of evidence should be used to support local woreda plans.

Clear and unambiguous guidance will be provided to implementing stakeholders on how targets should be used and interpreted. This guidance will make clear what is the role of targets (to support planning of inputs), the need for a complete separation of target setting from graduate identification, and the primacy of evidence based graduation.

Criteria for assessing graduates are appropriate and effectively applied

The Retreat and subsequent Steering Committee meeting endorsed the Assessment Teams findings concerning the problems faced implementing the current system of graduate identification. The Retreat confirmed the need for a system with an independently verifiable benchmark, but one which had much greater community involvement.

Based on the direction set by the retreat, the Steering Committee proposed a way forward which uses a mixture of quantitative data with a community based system, in order to identify possible and actual graduates.

The Steering Committee identified the need for a database which quantifies different livelihood characteristics of kebeles and enables the development of livelihood specific thresholds. They acknowledged that the EWRD already has such a livelihoods database (managed by the LIU) which already plays a major role in assessing relief needs. They agreed that a small joint GoE-DP team would discuss with technical staff directly from the LIU the feasibility of using the database.

The Steering Committee also suggested that the thresholds developed through analysis of the database be frequently verified in the field to verify their accuracy and usefulness

The Retreat also agreed the need for more robust early detection of any problems in the implementation of the graduate identification system, in order to resolve any inaccuracies in the graduate identification process.

The graduation process is effectively managed

The Retreat agreed to review the sixteen steps outlined in the current Graduation Guidance Note in the light of experience to date. The objective of this would be to both simplify the steps and reduce redundancy as well as to provide clearer guidance to frontline implementers.

In addition the retreat agreed to improve the management and supervision of the graduation process in order to improve support to those engaged in graduate identification and to improve the monitoring of the graduate identification process.

Capacity, documentation and training

The Retreat agreed that in order to enable more effective performance it was necessary to:

- Simplify the system;
- Ensure there was quality guidance to explain it better;
- Provide better and more training;
- Support and improve data management; and
- Develop better supervision.

The balance of incentives support graduation

The Retreat agreed that there is a need to work towards a balance of incentives which favour graduation at both community and woreda level. Such work should introduce new positive incentives, and remove – or counter-balance – disincentives. It should be developed on the basis of clear analysis and rolled out as part of the guidance provided regarding graduation. It is critical that such adjustments to the incentives do not encourage inappropriate graduation.

Safeguards are rigorously met

The Retreat agreed that it was necessary to address the current weaknesses in safeguards. Key areas in need of improvement include:

- Enhanced community awareness of the graduation criteria and identification process and the appeals process;
- Greater focus of the Rapid Response Team on graduation safeguard issues; and
- Better functioning of the PSNP appeals mechanism

This Way Forward Brief is based on a report entitled **Assessment of Graduation** by *theIDLgroup*, AZ Consult and ODI to the World Bank published in August 2010. This assessment was looking at graduation from the Productive Safety Net Programme, implemented by the FSPD. Interested readers can contact theIDLgroup (www.theIDLgroup.com) or the World Bank Office in Addis Ababa.

