

# DETERMINING OPTIMAL SEQUENCING OF INTERVENTIONS FOR OVC PROGRAMS

## OVC Graduation Brief Series: 3 of 4

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### Key Messages

1. OVC programs offer a menu of economic and social interventions that are sequenced differently across programs.
2. Although common guidance suggests that income-generation interventions come later in a sequence of economic strengthening activities, some programs have successfully introduced IGAs at an early stage alongside subsidies or risk-reduction measures.
3. Implementers identified several pathways where program components have mutually-reinforcing effects. They attributed graduation success in part to the integration of a comprehensive set of services to address complex household-level challenges.
4. Understanding interaction effects of program components requires additional study.
5. Implementers noted common factors for sustainable outcomes: building an integrated approach, the importance of case management for each household, and establishing a foundation of trust as a first step.

This brief is the third in our *OVC Graduation Brief Series*, which discusses the challenges faced by OVC programs in defining realistic, achievable minimum benchmarks for economic strengthening (ES) as well as sequencing interventions in order to prevent graduated households from backsliding, or returning to a pre-graduation state of vulnerability.

### Objectives

We conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with implementers of OVC programs on how ES is sequenced with other program components to achieve optimal results. Our

specific research questions include:

- How are OVC programs matching interventions to households?
- Are households able to rise from one level of vulnerability to the next by following the ES pathway?
- Should interventions be sequenced in a different way than suggested to ensure sustainable results?
- How should ES and non-ES components be sequenced?

## Methods

Between September 1 – 20, 2017, ASPIRES conducted seven KIIs with representatives from six OVC programs in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

<b>Better Outcomes</b> (2015 – 2020) Uganda	<b>Massimo Lowicki-Zucca</b> Chief of Party WorldEducation/Bantwana
<b>SCORE</b> (2011 -2018) Uganda	<b>Rita Larok</b> , Chief of Party AVSI Foundation
<b>STEER</b> (2013 – 2018) Nigeria	<b>Halima Dikko</b> , Deputy Chief of Party Save the Children
<b>Turengere Abana</b> (2012 – 2020) Rwanda	<b>Adeline Manikuzwe</b> , Technical Director FXB International
<b>Twiyubake</b> (2015 – 2020) Rwanda	<b>Juste Kayihura</b> , Director of Economic Strengthening <b>Tona Isibo</b> , Director of Monitoring, Evaluation, Results, and Learning Global Communities
<b>Yekozeb Berhan</b> (2011 – 2016) Ethiopia	<b>Michael Haddish</b> , ES Officer Pact

*Box 1. OVC Programs and Key Informants*

Interviewees were selected based on the recommendations of USAID’s OVC Technical Working Group as recent OVC programs using graduation approaches. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding on QSR NVivo 11.

## Findings

### PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

We examined six OVC programs in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda. These programs

featured an integrated set of interventions typical of large-scale USAID-funded OVC programs, including linkages to HIV and other health services, psychosocial support, ES, nutrition, education support, and other services. These services are delivered using household-centered approaches, including individual case management and home visits provided by professional staff and/or volunteers.

Respondents emphasized that ES interventions were considered crucial to sustainable graduation. However, we found that the reach of ES programming was variable. Certain models provided ES in some capacity to all households, while other models provided ES interventions only to households in specific vulnerability classifications. Notably, although respondents discussed the value of ES on its own, they also provided several examples of how ES strengthens or is supported by other intervention components.

### SEQUENCING

“Pathway” approaches to livelihoods programming, where interventions are sequenced in a linear fashion based on the household’s vulnerability level, were not the norm across the programs we examined. Approaches to ES and non-ES intervention sequencing varied, as did approaches to matching participants to interventions. Practitioners emphasized different perceived interaction effects between program components, but all acknowledged common key factors for sustained outcomes, including: building an integrated approach, the importance of case management for each household, and establishing a foundation of trust as a first step.

## Starting with trust

Successful community entry depends on establishing trust with potential participants and community partners. Respondents considered government institutions to be important brokers of trust. Representatives

from STEER and Yekokeb Berhan discussed the importance of outreach to government at the local, regional, and central levels to create stakeholder buy-in for project activities.

Another source of trust came from the regular interaction between participants and case workers. In Turengere Abana, savings groups established at the beginning of the program elect their own leaders, who double as parasocial workers responsible for monitoring and providing services to households in the group. This builds trust because staff are not only members of the community but also fellow program participants.

## Interactions between program components

All programs we investigated used a multi-sectoral approach. Respondents saw the various interventions as mutually reinforcing and important for sustainable program outcomes.

As such, it is difficult to determine the relative contribution of specific intervention components. For example, the final evaluation of SCORE was unable to tease out individual component effects: “The interrelated nature of the SCORE program challenged our ability to describe one singular driver of the changes cited. Several beneficiaries (12 out of the 40, or 30%) explicitly described a [most significant change] ... that occurred due to the combination of multiple project interventions” (MEASURE Evaluation, 2017).

Some specific combinations of components generated identifiable synergies. For example, multiple respondents described life skills as complementary to ES. Each program had a unique approach to life skills education; some examples include training on interpersonal communication, managing peer pressure, and coping with risky situations. Yekokeb Berhan’s ES Officer argued, “...life skills [training] makes other program components more sustainable.” SCORE’s COP described life skills as necessary for the success of SCORE’s youth apprenticeship package.

- Nutrition and ES are mutually reinforcing
- Life skills improves ES outcomes, especially for youth
- WASH improves nutrition and health outcomes
- Nutrition affects HIV treatment and overall health outcomes
- ES affects education outcomes
- Legal support affects economic outcomes
- Farmer Field School affects food security and economic outcomes

*Box 2. Synergies between intervention components as reported by respondents*

Representatives from STEER and Yekokeb Berhan cited the interdependence of nutrition and ES. Yekokeb Berhan’s mid-term evaluation reported: “ES initiatives have also enabled caregivers to do gardening. Extensive training has been provided to caregivers and saving groups on perma-gardening that helped families to produce food for them, and some have started marketing such product.” STEER’s DCOP made the connection more explicitly:

“...you can’t do nutrition without economic strengthening.” She also described how homestead gardening, or utilizing the space outside one’s home to grow a limited amount of food, supports economic outcomes through produce sales.

In contexts like rural Uganda, where SCORE operated, farming productivity is an important part of economic resilience for many families. In its evaluation of SCORE, MEASURE Evaluation found that Farmer Field School (FFS) interventions contributed to positive food security outcomes. In FFS, participants formed groups of 30 and collectively learned how to cultivate three types of crops: one for sale, one for home consumption, and one for nutrition. SCORE’s COP explained that FFS helped participants improve their bargaining power in the market and improved the food security of their families, which in turn increased children’s attendance at school. MEASURE Evaluation’s analysis also showed that the combination of horticultural training, participation in community dialogues related to child protection or legal support, and home visits increased the likelihood that children were enrolled in school.

SCORE’s COP further elaborated on the interplay between program components, including the effects of WASH on nutrition and health, nutrition’s impact on HIV treatment and overall health, and the effects of ES on education. Moreover, legal support influenced economic status, since HIV-affected households face particular challenges around property rights and inheritance following a death in the family. MEASURE Evaluation’s report also identified several combinations of interventions that were linked to specific outcomes. Qualitative data suggested that a combination of interventions focused on “resiliency,” such as FFS, SGs, and financial

literacy training, and others focused on “sensitization,” such as parenting and nutrition training, led to positive outcomes for children. However, statistical analysis found little evidence of significant interaction effects between two or three program components (MEASURE Evaluation, 2017, p. 36).

### *Matching interventions to households*

Some programs use a vulnerability index tool to assign households to a vulnerability classification, each receiving a specific set of sequenced interventions. This is reflective of PEPFAR’s 2012 guidance and related ES pathway frameworks, such as the LIFT Livelihood Pathway (see Brief 1 for details). SCORE, STEER, Yekokeb Berhan all use a vulnerability classification scheme based on three levels of vulnerability, similar to PEPFAR’s 2012 guidance. However, the demarcation between levels varied by program, as did the package of interventions deemed appropriate for each group.

SCORE classifies households as “critically vulnerable”, “moderately vulnerable”, or “stable”, which roughly correlate to PEPFAR’s classifications of “destitute”, “struggling to make ends meet”, and “prepared to grow”. In addition to savings, microinsurance, and other interventions designed to improve household resilience to shocks, “critically vulnerable” households are immediately engaged in enterprise and market development activities to expand income, which are reserved for “less vulnerable” households according to the LIFT and PEPFAR pathway frameworks. Then, households moving toward “moderately vulnerable” are targeted with financial linkages.

STEER’s classification most closely resembles a livelihoods pathway framework. It classifies

households as “most vulnerable” (in need of provision support), “more vulnerable” (in need of protection support), and “vulnerable” (at promotion stage ready for graduation). All participants receive financial literacy training at the inception of the program. “Most vulnerable” households are matched with in-kind and cash transfers and linked with food support. “More vulnerable” and “vulnerable” households are engaged in income-generating activities (IGAs), SGs, and homestead gardening. “More vulnerable” households receive financial literacy training, while “vulnerable” households are linked to market development and value chain interventions as well as credit services.

Yekokeb Berhan did not match households at the highest level of vulnerability (“destitute”) with ES interventions. These were only targeted to households classified as “struggling to make ends meet.” By the time households were classified as “prepared to grow,” on the other hand, they were expected to have successful microbusinesses. Considered to no longer be vulnerable, these households only received linkages to external programming.

Twiyubake, Turengere Abana, and Better

Outcomes did not use vulnerability classifications for intervention matching. In Twiyubake, households are classified into three vulnerability levels, but all participants receive the same package of interventions. Turengere Abana, in accordance with the FXBVillage model, matches interventions based on the length of time a household has spent in the program, starting with savings and IGAs with subsidies phased out over time. Better Outcomes does not use a prescribed system for matching households to interventions. As explained by Better Outcomes’ COP, “...it’s sort of an open-ended process where it’s just about identifying what the household would like to do and what they are capable of doing.”

Consumption support was the only intervention consistently described as targeted to a specific group of participants based on their level of economic vulnerability. Each program provided some form of consumption support, including: subsidies for special cases of need (SCORE); in-kind transfers (Yekokeb Berhan and Better Outcomes); programmed cash transfers (STEER and Twiyubake); and fully subsidized basic needs (Turengere Abana). This support is

	<i>Better Outcomes</i>	<i>SCORE</i>	<i>STEER</i>	<i>Turengere Abana</i>	<i>Twiyubake</i>	<i>Yekokeb Berhan</i>
1	Savings	Savings	Financial literacy	Financial literacy	Savings	Savings
2	Financial literacy	Financial literacy	Business training	Business training	Bank linkages	Business training
3	Business training	Business training	Savings	Savings	Financial literacy	Bank linkages
4	Bank linkages	Bank linkages		Group IGAs	Business training	

Figure 1. ES intervention sequencing across programs

typically provided for a discrete period to the most vulnerable households.

Specifically, Yekokeb Berhan provided in-kind support for education and food, and occasionally health and shelter, to destitute households. Better Outcomes provides educational subsidies to households at risk of child drop out. Their consumption support approach included an additional component focused on vouchers for agricultural products, which required some cost-sharing from the household. Turengere Abana, based on the FXBVillage model, offers financial support that is phased out over time. Over the three-year program, household cost-share increases from 25 to 100% to ensure households can meet all basic needs upon graduation.

By contrast, the SCORE model eschews subsidies. SCORE's COP shared that this is based on the belief that each household has some capacity to contribute to their own advancement, regardless of their starting vulnerability level. Program officers encourage households to save even very small amounts to grow their money over time. Despite this "no handout" policy, SCORE does provide limited subsidies in cases of extreme vulnerability. These were provided to 7% of households, including households that were headed by a child or very elderly caregiver, that had a household member with disabilities, or that faced particular crises, such as the family home burning down. According to MEASURE Evaluation's report, some respondents thought the lack of money and tangible resources provided to critically vulnerable households limited SCORE's ability to enter certain communities and engage target households in core program activities.

### *Intervention sequencing*

Across programs, ES interventions are introduced in distinct sequences (Figure 2). Better Outcomes' COP explained that though programmatically it makes sense to sequence ES interventions in specific ways, sequencing for Better Outcomes is primarily determined by the needs of the household as assessed by case managers. He suggested that the program tries to start with SGs and financial literacy, later introducing business training and private sector linkages. It also includes youth-specific interventions, starting with entrepreneurship training, then vocational training, apprenticeship, and job placements.

Most programs initiate ES activities with SGs. SCORE starts its ES program with SGs but waits until one year of participation to introduce group-based financial literacy training. After two SG cycles, participants begin introductory business training, which is later followed by advanced business training. Youth receive life skills and apprenticeship training instead. SGs are the overall programmatic entry point for Twiyubake. Groups receive financial education in the first year of operation. They also receive microenterprise development training and training on household financial decision-making. When they provide consumption support, it is either given to entire SGs or provided on a conditional basis to specific households. Twiyubake also targets SGs to youth, where they are provided with career planning and workforce readiness training. Yekokeb Berhan similarly started participants in SGs then provided business training.

STEER and Turengere Abana used a different approach, starting with financial literacy and business training, then facilitating savings. A key difference in this approach is that, while

most programs attempt to generate small amounts of business capital for poor households through SGs, Turengere Abana directly provides seed capital for business start-up to participants after they receive financial literacy training, and then introduces SGs. Later, the program encourages 3-4 SGs to join into a cooperative to launch joint IGAs. As explained by Turengere Abana's Technical Director, savings comes after starting an IGA "...because they can't start saving without any sort of income." This theory is in stark contrast with SCORE's model, which posits that all households, even the most vulnerable, can begin to save a small amount.

STEER also provides financial literacy training to all participants, then IGA training, then transitions them to SGs. Households deemed "most vulnerable" receive cash transfers for up to six months while receiving financial literacy training. STEER's DCOP described financial literacy as a crucial first step to effectively using the cash transfer: "Our cash transfer period is just for six months. So, what we are giving them at that time, if they don't have this financial literacy, they will not be able to take care of their household, and they may not be able to take something to begin an IGA."

Unlike other programs, STEER did not provide ES interventions immediately. ES was rolled out in the third year after participants were engaged in other interventions. The DCOP expressed regret stating, "...most of these households that are most vulnerable wouldn't have been most vulnerable up until now if we had started straight away with the psychosocial support and economic strengthening."

## Discussion

Core ES interventions across programs included financial literacy, savings, and business training, with some additional interventions that varied by program. However, sequencing of these interventions was not uniform and did not always follow PEPFAR's ES pathway. Four of the six programs started with savings interventions, while the other two started with financial literacy and business training prior to introducing savings.

PEPFAR's 2012 guidance makes clear that ES interventions should be tailored to family needs, and that the ES pathway is not a rigid mandate for programming. Indeed, the reality of OVC programming, and the evidence behind graduation approaches, demonstrates that very poor households can successfully engage in microenterprise but that formal microloans are more appropriate for households with the capacity to take on risk. It is also notable that IGAs introduced early in graduation programs, like those under the BRAC and FXBVillage models, are also subsidized. Among our informants, only Turengere Abana described using subsidies in support of business development rather than solely for consumption support. Interest-free loans or grants are one way to engage households in income-generation at an appropriate level of risk.

That is not to say that programs should start with IGAs. Whether or not a program introduces income-generation first, evidence has shown that poor people can and do save, and that savings can improve entrepreneurial investment (Karlan et al., 2014). Another common intervention is financial literacy training. In the five programs that offer it, this training is provided prior to business training, demonstrating the consensus that a basic level of financial literacy is

necessary to ensure success in business.

Although households are classified by vulnerability level in most of the programs we reviewed, only consumption support was regularly matched to households based on their level of economic vulnerability. It was used to jumpstart participant microbusinesses, as in Turengere Abana, or to help households overcome extreme constraints to being economically active in the most basic sense, as in SCORE. However, the groups least likely to be economically active and most in need of subsidies, such as households who had lost a breadwinner, were also the groups that most needed SCORE's services. Indeed, SCORE's COP noted that the households found least likely to graduate in MEASURE Evaluation's final evaluation were also those who needed consumption support or services considered beyond SCORE's scope. These include groups that are squarely within the population that OVC programs are meant to serve (i.e. child-headed or elderly-headed households and households with disabilities). Although subsidies are expensive, they can successfully expand a program's ability to reach very vulnerable households. Cost-effectiveness studies are needed to determine how and when subsidies are most effective in OVC programs. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the limits of ES in assisting households that are incapable of economic activity, and who require broader social protection support.

Although informants did not have strong opinions about the ideal sequencing of economic and non-economic interventions, they identified specific synergies between program components. SGs were used as the entry point for all Twiyubake programming and cited as an entry point to other ES programming by Better Outcomes. STEER's COP noted that the project would have benefitted from introducing ES earlier relative to other components. ES was noted as important to gardening and food security/nutrition, which in

turn affected participant HIV and health outcomes and children's schooling. Nutrition and food security were affected by WASH interventions, and life skills was seen as generally supportive of various outcomes. Overall, participant impressions of program synergies aligned with MEASURE Evaluation's finding that, in SCORE, "resiliency" interventions, like ES, and "sensitization" interventions, covering most other program components, generated positive outcomes for children.

## Conclusions

Overall, respondents emphasized the importance of an integrated approach rather than the specific order of economic interventions. ES intervention sequencing is not standardized across projects, nor does it always align with common guidance. Most programs attempt to classify households into vulnerability categories based on a scale, but these classifications are typically not used to match participants to interventions, with few exceptions. Yekokeb Berhan only provided ES to households classified as "struggling" and, more commonly, very vulnerable households were targeted for consumption support. These findings suggest that IGAs can be introduced early to poor households, although they may require subsidies or other risk-reduction measures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For program sequencing, we recommend that implementers continue to provide services in a way that addresses the unique and interconnected needs of individual households. In particular, a mix of resiliency and sensitization interventions should be provided concurrently to promote sustainable outcomes. We caution against using simple scales to classify household vulnerability and subsequently match households to ES interventions based on that classification. Scales can oversimplify a household's situation, causing case managers to overlook key areas

where ES and other programs may be necessary. Rather, implementers should educate households to understand their capacity for risk and encourage participation in ES interventions that fit their needs. To avoid backsliding, we recommend that implementers continue to emphasize linkages to local community resources and build participant capacities to access those resources. We also recommend that programs provide greater participant access to ES, particularly for the most vulnerable households.

## NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH

Evidence-based guidelines on sequencing require additional research. Retrospective studies that follow up on participant outcomes after graduation are needed to understand patterns in how interventions are sequenced to yield sustainable outcomes. Qualitative study is needed to unpack how households leverage various components to continually meet and move beyond basic needs. Rigorous program evaluations will generate evidence on optimal intervention sequencing.

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