



Graduation Approach: Evidence for FY25 Niger RFSA

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— What can we (not) expect the Graduation Approach to achieve?



What evidence are we looking at here, and why?

- All of the conclusions in this section are based on evidence from **randomized impact evaluations**, which allow us to draw conclusions about causality
- When designing programming, we are always choosing how to allocate limited resources among different interventions—graduation is one of a small number of programs for which this robust evidence base exists

Consistent, positive impacts on economic outcomes across contexts and adaptations

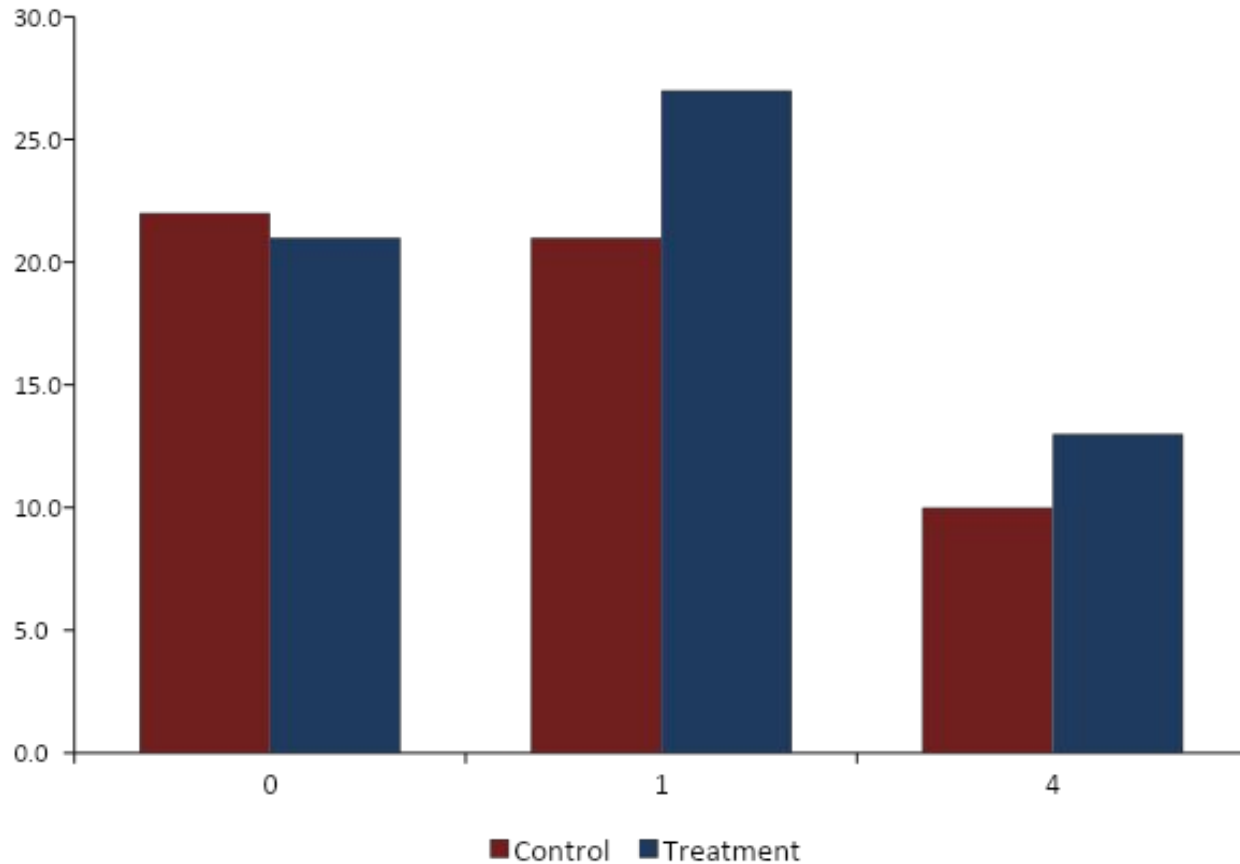
- The impacts of 26+ graduation programs have been evaluated in 20 countries, including fragile and conflict-affected contexts
- Almost all find positive impacts on **income** (12 - 60% gain) and **consumption** (5 - 30% gain)
- All evaluations find positive impacts on **assets** (10 - 400% gain) and **savings**
- In the few studies that measure long-run impacts, participants have **higher consumption and assets for at least 4-8 years** after the program ends

Are the impacts of graduation programs sustainable?

“Our core result is that while there **continue to be positive treatment effects on household welfare** seven years after the initial program, long-run impacts have faded relative to the impacts present in earlier waves, **driven by strong growth in control group living standards.**”

Ethiopia vs. other long-run results (Afghanistan)

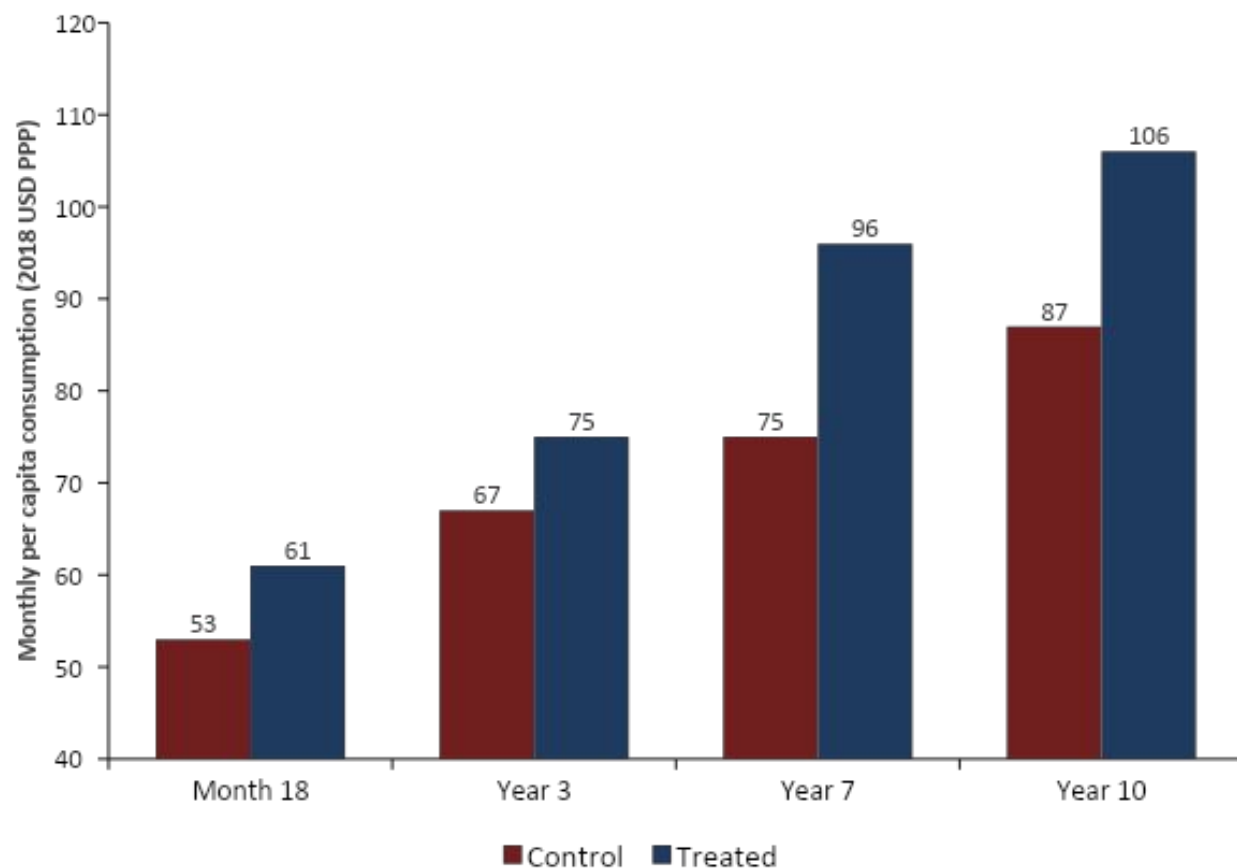
Monthly Per Capita Consumption (2018 USD)



- Similar trajectory in short run
- Program enabled diversification into new income sources (higher-value livestock and non-livestock activities) in the long-run
- In the face of severe shocks, participants were more likely to recover, less likely to use negative coping mechanisms to do so
- Macroeconomic context: Inflation and economic challenges due to drought, conflict, and COVID-19

Ethiopia vs. other long-run results (India)

(a) Per-capita consumption (2018 USD PPP)



- Part of same, coordinated research effort
- Similar trajectory in short run
- Increasing treatment effects between years 3 and 7, which persist to (at least) year 10
- **Migration for wage employment** was key driver of long-run treatment effects
- Similar macroeconomic context: growth in wages, income, and consumption during the intervention and subsequent years

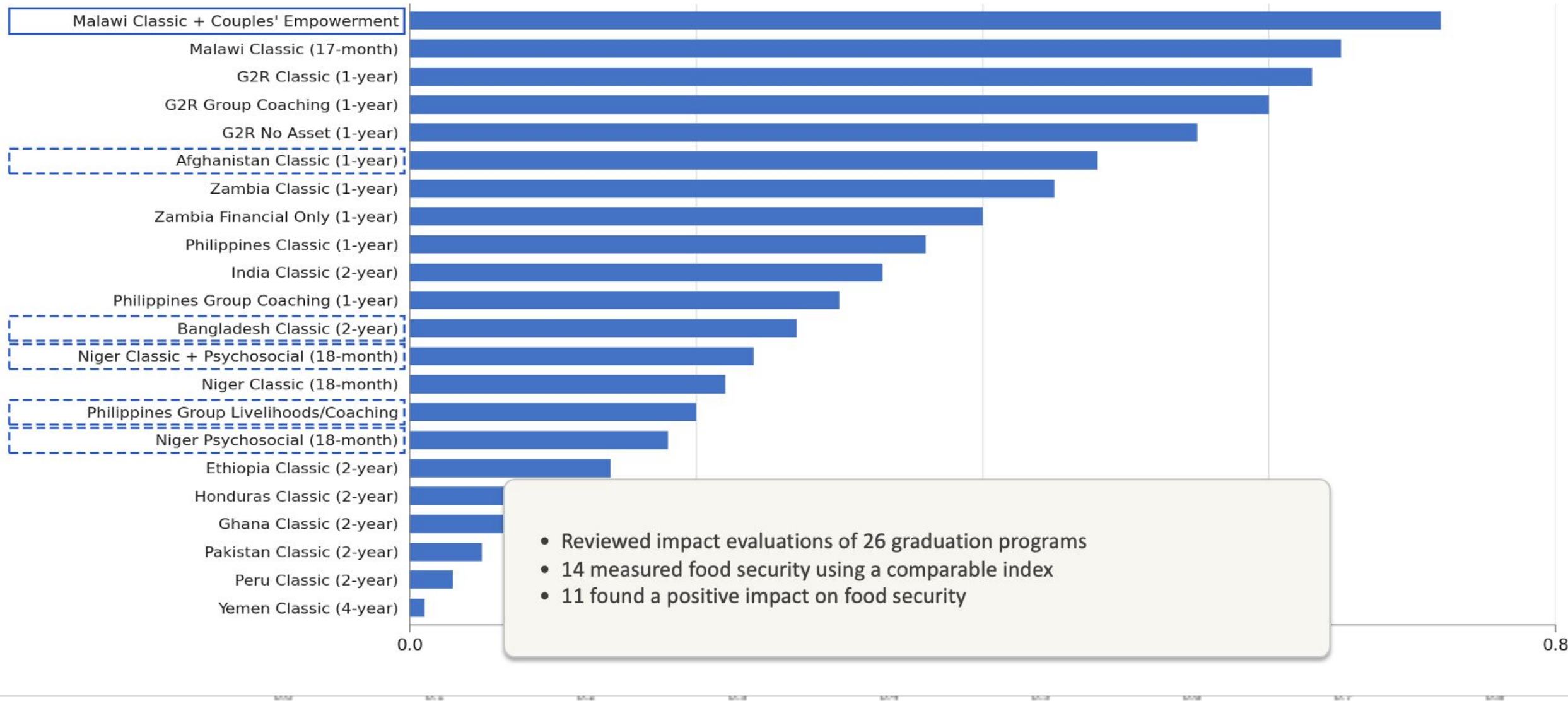
What to make of these long-run results?

- Graduation programs consistently lead to meaningful improvements in household consumption and assets in the short- and medium-term, across a range of contexts
- In fragile contexts, Graduation programs can enable households to weather shocks and economic downturn
- In contexts with strong economic conditions, Graduation programs can enable households to take advantage of new income-generating opportunities sooner than they would otherwise be able to
 - In some cases, this leads to persistent or growing improvements in income
 - In others, it's an “acceleration” of improvements that would otherwise take longer

Impacts on social capital, food security, resilience are promising but less studied

- **Social capital:** In 7 studies (10 countries) that measure community engagement, political participation, and/or social support, these indicators increased by 10-42%
- **Food security:** In 12 studies (14 countries) that measure food access, related indicators increased by 5 to 52%
- **Resilience:** In 4 studies (4 countries) that measure ability to cope with shocks, households report greater ability to cope with climate- or conflict-related challenges
- **Women's empowerment:** some promising examples, but no consistent positive effects
 - In Afghanistan, women were 61% more likely to have financial assets in their own names
 - In DRC, women were 5-9% more likely to participate in household economic and health decisions
 - Programs in Burkina Faso and Niger also increased women's control over their earnings
 - However, no lasting effects on women's empowerment in at least 7 other programs

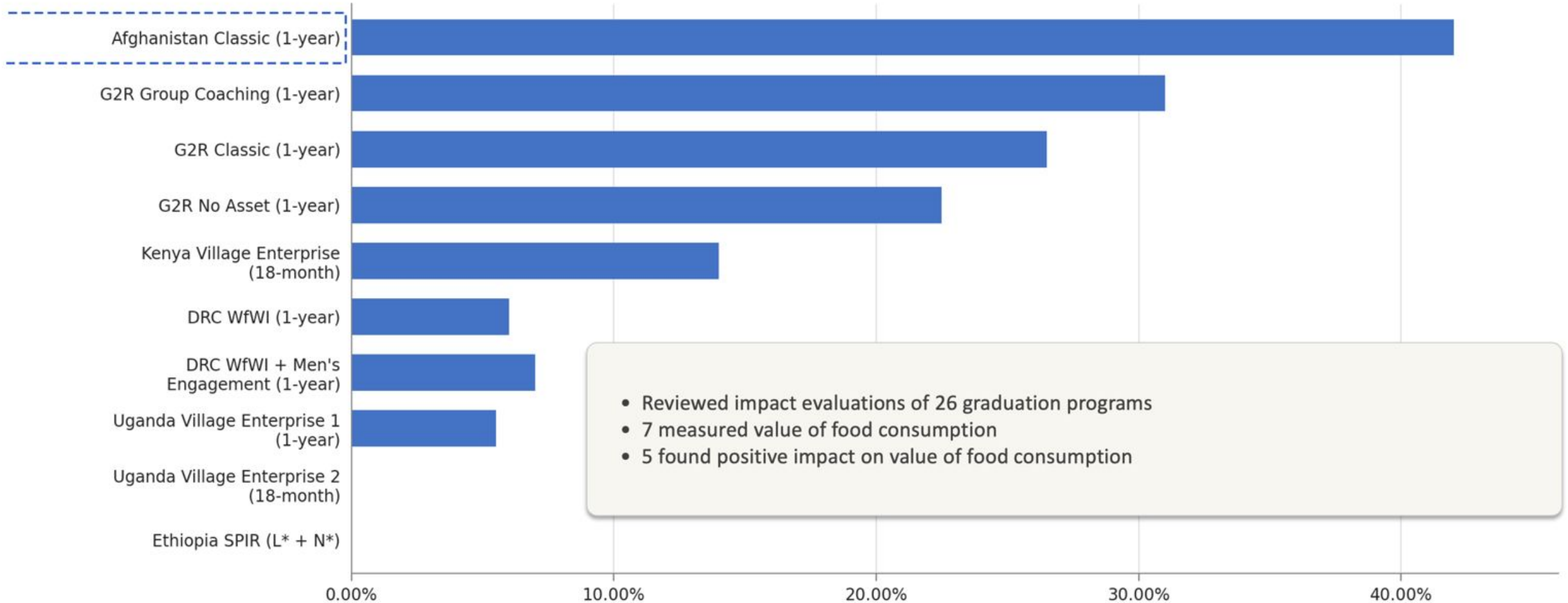
Improvements in food security (broadly defined)



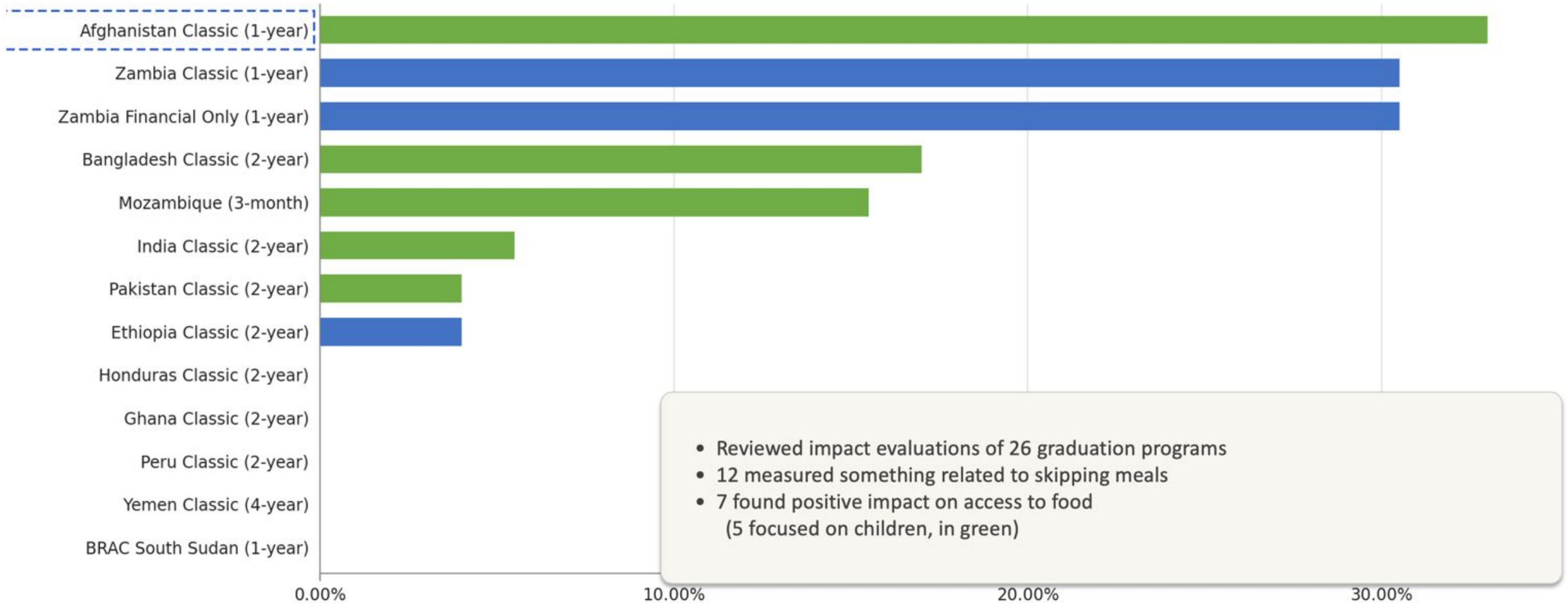
What's included in a “food security index”

- For the most part, food security index measures food access, including indicators like:
 - Whether the household experienced any difficulty fulfilling its food needs
 - Number of meals consumed
 - Whether the household, or individual members, skipped meals
 - Household Food Insecurity Access Scale
- Some indices include measures related to dietary diversity, e.g.,:
 - Food Consumption Score
 - Consumption of meat
- Graduating to Resilience included children's length-/height-for-age

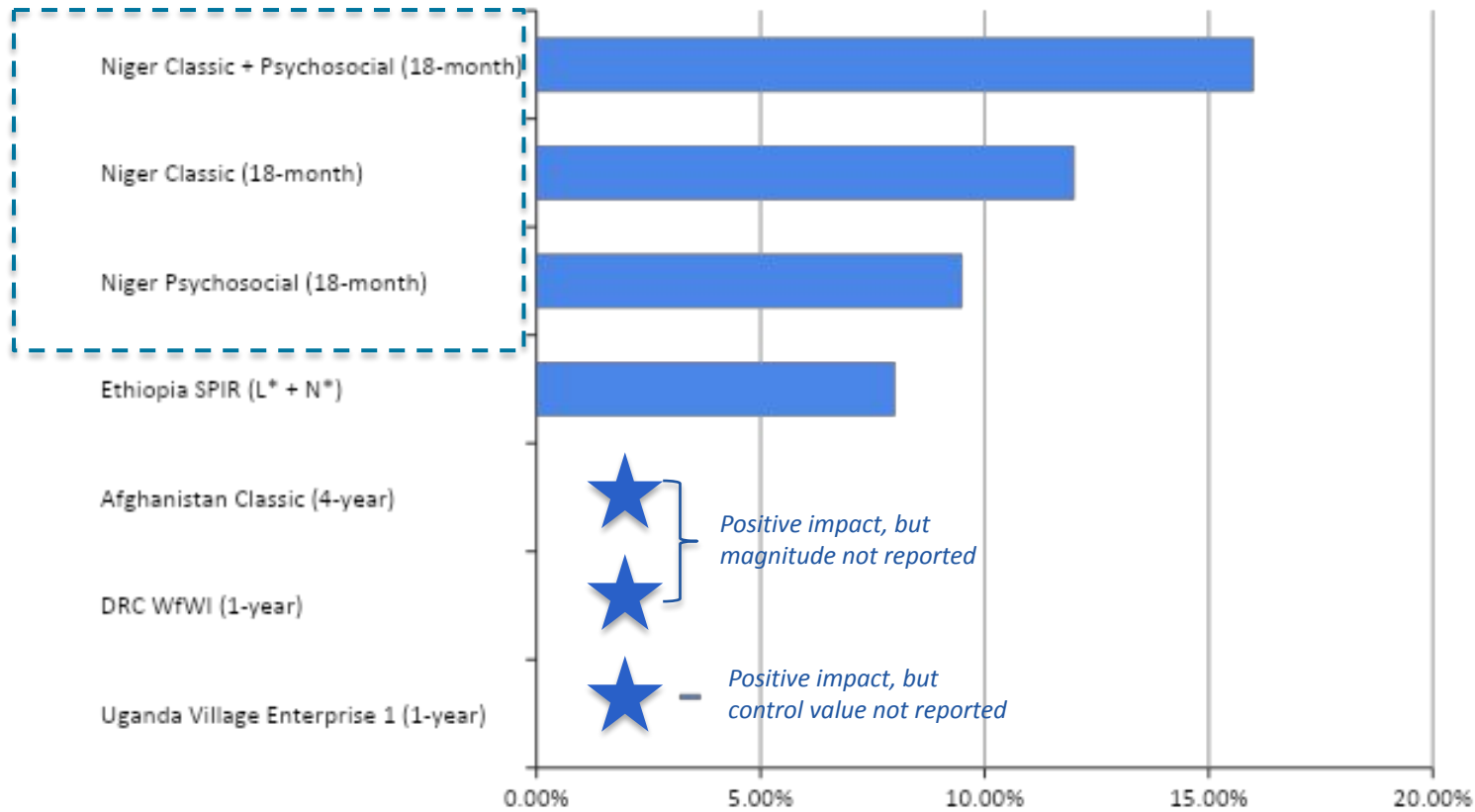
Impacts on monetary value of food consumption



Improvement in number of meals consumed

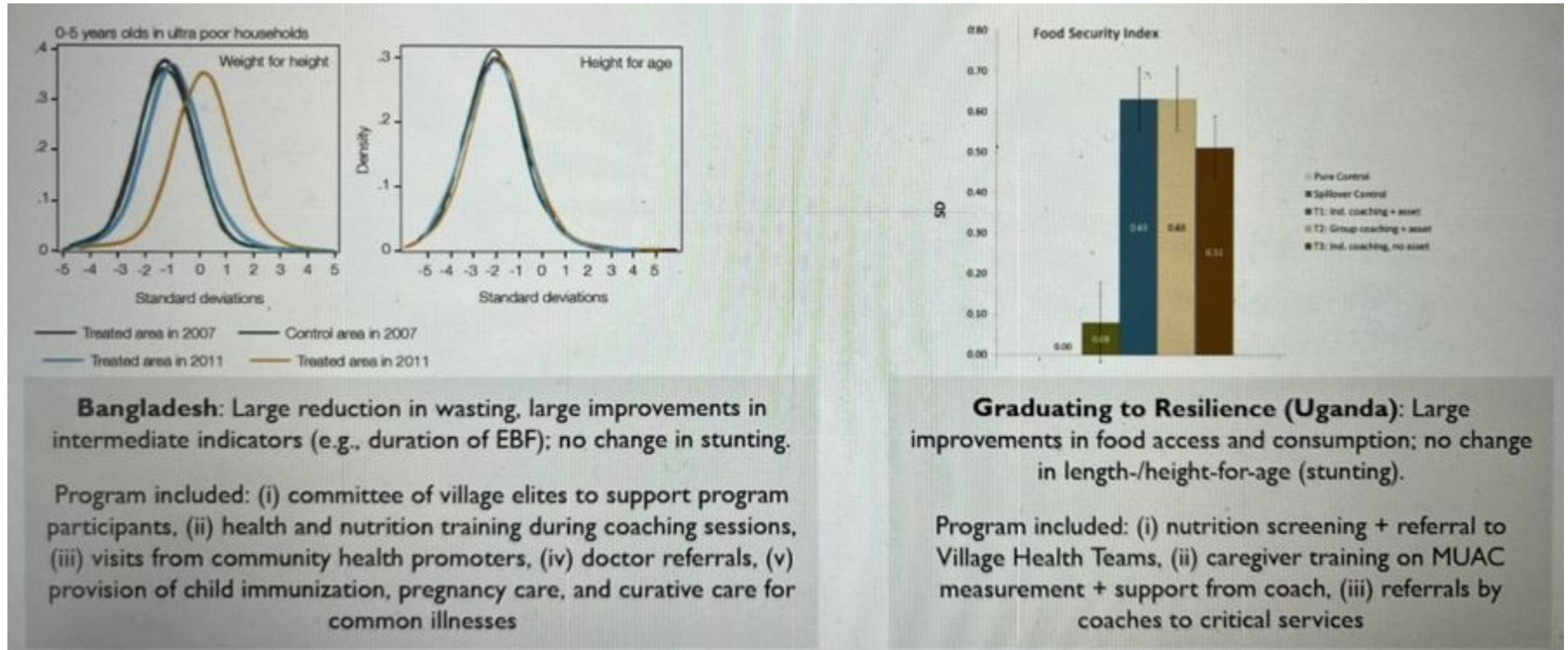


Improvement in dietary diversity



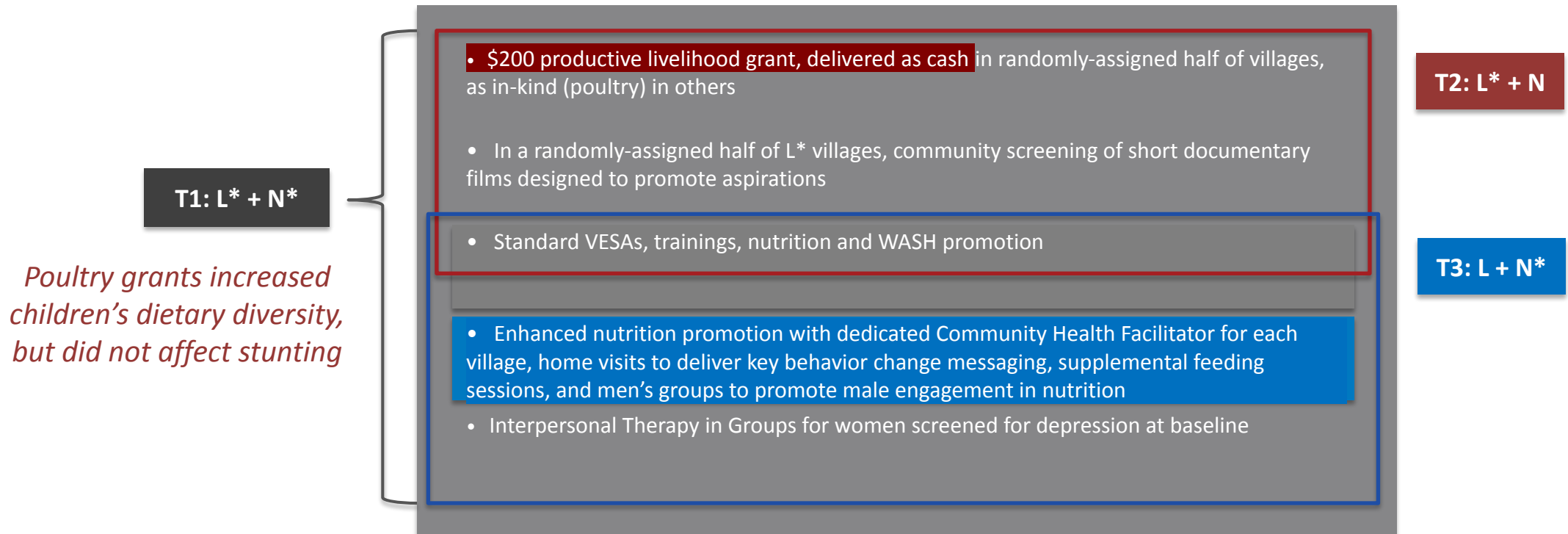
- Reviewed impact evaluations of 26 graduation programs
- 5 measured dietary diversity
- All 5 found positive impact on dietary diversity

Impacts on anthropometric indicators have only been measured in 3 studies, with mixed results



Nutrition Outcomes: SPIR (Ethiopia)

Alderman et al. 2023 find that knowledge and behavior changed under both the standard and enhanced nutrition model (T2/T3 vs C), but neither led to improvements in child stunting. However, delivering enhanced nutrition with cash grants (T1 vs C) led to 18 percentage point (33%) reduction in stunting.



Intimate partner violence

- When graduation studies measure impacts on violence, they focus on IPV, and generally find limited impacts
- In terms of **women's empowerment more generally**: some promising examples, but no consistent positive effects
 - In Afghanistan, women were 61% more likely to have financial assets in their own names
 - In DRC, women were 5-9% more likely to participate in household economic and health decisions
 - Programs in Burkina Faso and Niger also increased women's control over their earnings
 - However, no lasting effects on women's empowerment in at least 7 other programs

Children in school, health

- Impacts of graduation programs on schooling are mixed:
 - In Afghanistan, a program increased enrollment for children aged 6-18 by 5.6 percentage points (10%), measured 4 years after all program support ended
 - In the DRC, a streamlined program designed to promote women's economic and social empowerment increased school enrollment for children aged 5-18 by 5 percentage points (7%), measured 1 year after all program support ended
 - In Uganda, a streamlined program that promotes group, rather than individual, enterprise development did not affect student enrollment and attendance, measured 1 year after the program ended
- • Impacts of graduation programs on physical health are slightly more promising, but not measured frequently enough to draw strong conclusions:
 - In Afghanistan, children under 5 were 8 percentage points (16%) less likely to have experienced diarrhea, measured 1 year after the program ended
 - In Uganda, a BHA-funded program improved participants' self-reported health (on a scale of 1-10) by 0.45, a 9% improvement
- In Burkina Faso, a streamlined program increased household expenditure on children (including health, schooling, and clothing) by 19%, and by 76% when combined with a child well-being component offered to all household members

Some of our frequently-asked questions can't be answered with cost-effectiveness evidence

- What about community-level resilience?
- What is the most effective way to link participants to other services?
- How many people will “graduate”?
- Shouldn't we also “strengthen” markets or other social services?
 - We know that graduation can deliver impact in severely resource-constrained contexts
 - The Graduation Approach extends and strengthens value chains by making them accessible to low-income households
 - **Question should be:** How much would it cost to do these extra things, and are we sufficiently convinced that doing so will generate enough impact that it's worth *not* delivering the core intervention to more households?

While the Graduation Approach delivers support at the household level, it is a systems-level approach in many ways

- The Graduation Approach extends and strengthens value chains by making them accessible to low-income households
- Some Graduation programs include efforts to bring market providers closer to ultra-poor households (“market systems development”)
 - Makes sense if we believe that private sector providers don’t know about the market opportunities in these communities → help the private sector learn
 - Doesn’t make sense if it’s too expensive for private sector providers to visit these communities → subsidies will only generate short-term change in private sector behavior
 - No existing evidence on the added value or sustainability of these efforts, but ongoing research in Uganda is a start

There is likely scope to reduce the complexity, and improve the cost-effectiveness of delivering the graduation approach

- For which populations is a “streamlined” approach sufficient?
 - In Zambia, delivering just the productive asset transfer + savings components generated impacts equal to a full graduation program (Botea et al. 2023)
 - But studies in Ghana, South Sudan, and Uganda suggest something about the full package adds value beyond the individual components (Banerjee et al. 2022; Chowdhury et al. 2017; Sedlmayr et al. 2020)
- For which populations is additional support necessary, and what is the right design of that additional support?
 - Gender-focused add-ons
 - Deeper emphasis on nutrition
 - Fostering (connections to) markets
- Can innovations in implementation reduce program costs / improve quality?
 - Incorporating technology for participants and/or coaches
 - Organizational incentives to improve coach quality/efficiency

Two of the “top six” programs included intensive additional support

- **Concern Worldwide’s Tiwolohe program in Malawi:**
 - Coaching included linkages and referrals
 - “Community enabling environment” activities were ongoing during graduation project:
 - Health, nutrition, and hygiene promotion
 - Training for lead farmers and community animal health workers
 - Promotion of conservation agriculture through demo plots and field days
 - Seed fairs and mobilization of private agro-dealers
 - Facilitating access to savings and loans at community level
 - Support to community-level DRM activities, support to local structures
- **BHA-funded SPIR in Ethiopia**
 - Nutrition BCC delivered via 11 HH visits by a Community Health Facilitator
 - Support to village-level WASH activities and implementation of CLTSH
 - Participatory nutrition promotion with intensive feeding sessions for underweight children
 - Male engagement groups met for 8 facilitated sessions
 - Women screened for depression received Interpersonal Therapy in Groups for 12 weeks

But four included (much) lighter-touch food- or nutrition-focused programming

- **MIFSA's program in Afghanistan**
 - Provision of a basic hygiene kit
 - Reimbursement of up to \$22 for latrine improvements or medical expenses
 - Food supplements or asset replacement if coaches determined necessary
 - Coaches provided support to get a national ID
- **AVSI's Graduating to Resilience program in Uganda**
 - Coaches conducted nutrition screening and referrals to Village Health Teams
 - Hosted a "Market Event" to connect participants to the private sector
- **World Bank's graduation program in Niger**
 - Community film screening + discussion on social norms and collective aspirations
 - 7-day life skills training for participants
 - Altogether, these additional interventions cost \$53 per participating HH
- **Government of Zambia's Supporting Women's Livelihoods program in Zambia**
 - No additional programming targeting nutrition
 - Delivering *just* the \$225 asset transfer + facilitating savings groups generated the same effects on food security as the full program (including 6 months of coaching, and 21 training sessions)

Key takeaways: improving nutrition within or alongside a graduation program

- Ultimate question is: What outcome are we targeting, for whom? And what is the most cost-effective way to achieve that outcome, in this context?
 - *Question is not:* What interventions do we typically deliver? What do we think will work, based on theory, opinions, personal experience?
- If our focus is **food access and dietary diversity**, a “standard” graduation program with a well-designed coaching curriculum is likely sufficient → allows us to **maximize reach** of this proven approach to building resilience and well-being
- If our focus is **stunting**, need to look for evidence-based approaches to improving length-/height-for-age in relevant contexts
 - Selected intervention(s) must generate impact **greater than the alternative of delivering graduation** to more households
 - **Nutrition evidence needs to be held to same standard** as graduation evidence in terms of (i) rigorous identification of cause/effect and (ii) contextual relevance

Open questions still remain about operationalizing the Graduation Approach in different implementation contexts

1. Adapting delivery for urban settings
 - a. Challenges are more diverse, but so are income-generating opportunities
 - b. “Caseworker with a budget”?
2. Supporting participants to select the appropriate livelihood; effectively communicating risks and potential returns associated with each option
3. Building the capacity of local partners to implement Graduation
4. Supporting governments to incorporate Graduation programs, where feasible
5. How to coordinate with and make linkages to external services (e.g., national social protection systems, emergency food assistance)
6. Enabling participants to
 - a. scale beyond household-level enterprise
 - b. transition into the formal economy, where feasible

Overall takeaways

- Primary question should always be: **What outcome(s) are we trying to improve?**
- For activities that aim to increase households' ability to meet consumption needs, especially in fragile contexts, the graduation approach is a highly promising approach
- In most cases, our first instinct should not be to add to the core components, but instead to “streamline” one or more components (**↓ costs = ↑ reach**)
- If reducing stunting is our objective, standard graduation is unlikely to drive change
 - We likely need to add nutrition-focused programming
 - But that does not mean we should implement standard “Christmas Tree” programming
 - Evidence can guide us to cost-effective interventions for this outcome, too
- There is more to learn → **let's fill evidence gaps**