Transforming the Ultra-Poor’s Lives

Researchers conducted a seven-year study of BRAC’s ‘Targeting the Ultra-Poor’ programme in 1309 villages across Bangladesh’s poorest districts.

BRAC’s programme provides livestock and hands-on support to the poorest women in the poorest Bangladesh villages.

This was a ‘big push’ to move the recipients into more profitable and stable self-employment. Women received livestock and two years of training to help them work with the livestock – worth a total of approximately $280.

Researchers found that the poorest are unable – rather than unwilling or unfit – to do more productive work.

The ultra-poor are limited to irregular, poorly paid agricultural and domestic maid jobs. Their hourly earnings would be twice as high rearing livestock.

Seven years after the start of the programme, beneficiaries continue to escape poverty at a steady rate.

After 4 years the women shifted to more steady and productive work. They worked 25% more days and increased earnings by 37%. After 7 years access to renting or owning land was 2 times higher than in year 4.

The BRAC model has shown to be scalable and effective across a wide range of contexts and countries.

Since 2002, BRAC has reached over 1.6 million households in Bangladesh via its Targeting the Ultra-Poor programme. Studies of this model applied elsewhere show similar impacts – more stable self-employment and increased savings.

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