

Are there sustainable ways to alleviate child poverty?

project facts

Key words

Child poverty, Theory of Change, Cognitive development, Safe environments, Children

Behavioral themes

Economic empowerment through behavioral change
Protective behaviors and safe environments for children
Behavioral capacity building for sustainable development
Behavioral support and mental health promotion

Research design

Co-Designing a Theory of Change and Learning Agenda for the NGO Yamba Malawi

Scope

Start date: February 2021

End date: April 2024

Internal participants: Leadership and executive members of the NGO

Location

Nigeria: Kebbi and Sokoto States

Ethiopia: Hawassa

Partner

Yamba Malawi

Ethics approval

N/A - we did not work with external participants

Developing a Theory of Change to find sustainable ways to create safe environments for children and alleviate child poverty.

Background: Building empowered and economically resilient communities that protect children's rights and provide for their wellbeing

In Malawi, pervasive issues like child poverty, food insecurity, lack of emotional nurturing, and inadequate education hinder children's ability to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Yamba Malawi aims to address these challenges through a poverty-graduation-style intervention that promotes caregiving and enhances community well-being.

This project aimed to rethink Yamba's Theory of Change, underpinned by rigorous, evidence-based analysis and community insights, and proposes a new monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of its graduation program effectively.

Conducting the research

We followed a systematic approach that began with defining the vision and ultimate goal, identifying near- and long-term outcomes, and establishing causal links between activities and outcomes. This approach was fueled by both an extensive literature review and insights from co-design sessions and focus group discussions with Yamba staff.

- » **Sustainable self-sufficiency:** Alleviating child poverty is a complex endeavor. Yamba's poverty graduation programs empower caregivers to achieve long-term economic resilience and self-sufficiency through a combination of asset transfers, skills training, and financial services, breaking the cycle of poverty sustainably.
- » **The mere measurement effect:** When deploying a poverty graduation intervention for children, it matters which children in a household one collects data on (Raitzer, Batmunk & Yarcia 2022). Households tend to allocate greater resources to children observed by researchers, potentially creating adverse effects on unobserved children (Cockburn et al. 2009).
- » **Happy mother, happy child:** The mental health of mothers plays a critical role in the social and cognitive development of children (Familiar et al. 2016). Psychoeducational interventions have shown promising effects on caregiving and overall well-being (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2015)

Implications

For policymakers:

Given the strong evidence poverty graduation programs can sustainably alleviate poverty, more funding is needed to scale the programs across contexts.

For practitioners:

This research lends itself to a foundational understanding of the effects that child poverty graduation programs can have on their participants.

Recommendations for future research

To elucidate the multifaceted barriers caregivers face, rigorous research into the interplay between financial constraints, knowledge gaps, and cultural norms is imperative. Investigating how cognitive biases induced by socioeconomic stress influence caregiving requires robust empirical evidence. Key questions include how participation in Yamba Malawi's programs alters caregivers' investment attitudes toward child welfare. Additionally, entrepreneurial success in impoverished regions depends on both environmental factors and individual traits of entrepreneurs, yet research has primarily focused on institutional barriers, neglecting how personal characteristics and decisions influenced by behavioral biases like present bias impact productivity and success in resource-limited settings. Future research should focus on these questions to help micro-entrepreneurs yield greater success.

Further reading

- Cockburn, J., Dauphin, A., & Razzaque, M. A. (2009). Child poverty and intra-household allocation. *Children Youth and Environments*, 19(2), 36-53.
- Familiar I, Collins SM, Sikorskii A, Ruisenor-Escudero H, Natamba B, Bangirana P, Widen EM, Achidri D, Achola H, Onen D, Boivin M, Young SL. Quality of Caregiving is Positively Associated With Neurodevelopment During the First Year of Life Among HIV-Exposed Uninfected Children in Uganda. *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr*. 2018 Mar 1;77(3):235-242. doi: 10.1097/QAI.0000000000001599. PMID: 29210832; PMCID: PMC5807172.
- Quentin Stoeffler & Bradford Mills & Patrick Premand, 2020. "Poor Households' Productive Investments of Cash Transfers: Quasi-experimental Evidence from Niger," *Journal of African Economies*, Centre for the Study of African Economies, vol. 29(1), pages 63-89.
- Raitzer, David and Batmunkh, Odbayar and Yarcia, Damaris, *Intrahousehold Responses to Imbalanced Human Capital Subsidies: Evidence from the Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer Program* (January 6, 2022). Asian Development Bank Economics Working Paper Series No. 645, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4002278> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4002278>
- Rotheram-Borus, M. J., Tomlinson, M., Le Roux, I., & Stein, J. A. (2015). Alcohol use, partner violence, and depression: a cluster randomized controlled trial among urban South African mothers over 3 years. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 49(5), 715-725.

Study team

Jennifer Adhiambo, Jonathan Karl, Pauline Wanjeri.

To cite:

Busara. 2025. *Are there sustainable ways to alleviate child poverty?* (The *aha!* moment No. 11). Malawi: Busara. DOI: doi.org/10.62372/NJDN1249

The *aha!* moment summarises key facts and insights from Busara's research projects.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the positions of funders or partners. ©Busara 2025.

38 Apple Cross Road, Nairobi, Kenya www.busara.global