WINGS for Congolese Youth: Increasing Access to Sustainable Employment and Livelihood Opportunities in North Kivu, funded by the Center for Disaster Philanthropy Impact Report

Feb 2025

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Summary of Results

Overall, WINGS for Congolese Youth, a Positive Youth Development (PYD) livelihoods model, has had a clear and measurable impact. The consistency registered across multiple indicators—employment, financial security, social engagement, and self-efficacy—suggest that the program is effectively fostering long-term economic and social empowerment. The **net impact**, calculated as the rate of change for the supported group minus the rate of change for the control group, further confirms the program's effectiveness. The impact is even stronger among a sub-group of participants, those already practicing their newly learned trade. Furthermore, as more supported youth completed their training and entered the workforce subsequent to the endline study, which was completed one month earlier than the program end on account of security concerns, it is likely that the full benefits of the program were not captured in the reported endline results. The net impact analysis across all metrics confirms that the program has contributed to improved outcomes of participants compared to the control group.

Indicators of employment, income generation and access to credit from baseline to endline include the following:

- The employment rate increased by 61% among participants while decreasing 29% among the control group. Among females, the impact was even stronger, with an increase of 91% in the employment rate of the female participants, as opposed to a decrease of 32% among women of the control group.
- Revenues for participants increased by 50%, while they decreased 16% for the control group. The increase was even more pronounced among the subgroup of youth who were already practicing the trade they had learned in the program before endline data collection: their average income increased 165%, from $0.89 a day to $2.35, above the poverty line commonly set at $2.15 a day. The results for women in revenue-related indicators were less pronounced, although the increase of 14% in the income of the female participants should be compared with the decrease of 27% among the female youth in the control group.
- Access to savings and credit increased. 84% of participants are now members of a savings and loan group, as opposed to 17% for the control group. Additionally, an indirect impact of the project was that the share of the youth with a bank account went from 1% to 4% among participants, and to 8% for the participants already practicing their newly learned trade before the endline data collection.

Indicators in other areas were also compared, baseline to endline with the following results:

- Self-reported measures of enhanced leadership and agency of participants. Reduction in the share of participants feeling stigmatized and the increase in their self-reported confidence in public speaking. The share of youth who regarded themselves as community leaders increased from 25% to 40% among participants and decreased from 29% to 26% for the control group. Similar trends were registered among women. The share of youth reporting control over personal decisions increased as did the share of youth expressing confidence in the ability to solve difficult problems among participants as compared to the control group.

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Contents

Summary of Results 3

Introduction and Methodology 5

Context and Participants 6

Results 10

Economic Results 11

Employment, income, and economic perspectives. 11

Access to savings 16

Social Results 18

Leadership and social skills 18

Agency and attitudes 20

Health 22

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Introduction and Methodology

The Project. With funding from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, AVSI piloted an adaptation of the WINGS+ model to the conditions of the protracted crisis affecting Goma, North Kivu, DRC, worsened by the COVID pandemic. The WINGS+ model is a livelihoods program that AVSI has developed and tested over two decades with women and young people mainly in Uganda, especially those impacted by internal displacement in the north of the country. The program model consists of business skills training, a cash grant, and follow-up support to establish small enterprises in addition to focused training on life skills and opportunities to expand peer networks and receive mentorship. The model adapted for Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) allows the possibility for youth to find employment in already established small enterprises in addition to entrepreneurship opportunities.

AVSI-USA was the lead partner working in conjunction with AVSI DRC, with a presence in DRC since 2002 in education, protection, food security, nutrition and energy with vulnerable populations such as IDPs and refugees in conflict and post-conflict areas in North Kivu, Sud Kivu, Iturbi, Tanganyika, Haut Katanga and Lualaba. The Congo Tree (TCT), a youth-driven organization working in DRC since 2013 with the vision of equipping, inspiring, and supporting young people, was an important local partner for AVSI. The Congo Tree works to develop the skills of young people with potential to become next generation leaders in community development. AVSI Uganda provided a technical team that was responsible for adapting the WINGS model to DRC including staff training and ongoing technical support. The AVSI Regional MEAL team was responsible for ensuring the quality of data collection, storage and analytics and general oversight of local staff in MEAL functions.

AVSI Uganda's technical team, working together with AVSI DRC and TCT, modified the training curriculum to fit the challenges of the setting and needs of the local population. The goal for program participants was to complete the program equipped with the skills and start-up capital to create or enter a self-sustaining small business that will benefit themselves and their families.

Project Participants. The project took place in 4 neighborhoods of Goma: Virunga, Ndosho, Katindo, and Ngangi. Project participants were recruited from youth already associated with either The Congo Tree or AVSI programs; AVSI operates a privately funded Distance Support Program (DSP) that serves 800 vulnerable children in the same area. AVSI invited older relatives (18-24 years) of the children and families in the DSP and TCT to participate in the WINGS program. AVSI identified as eligible 320 young people—50% female and 50% male—who met the following criteria: i) age 18 to 24; ii) family is receiving services from TCT, DSP; iii) availability to participate actively in trainings and project activities; iv) expressed interest in the personal growth and livelihoods objectives of the project.

The 4 neighborhoods include some of the most dangerous areas of the city of Goma, where children experience violence, lawlessness, and trauma. All participants met vulnerability criteria, many living without their biological parents and some with disabilities including mental health conditions, epilepsy and loss of limb.

Impact Evaluation Design. AVSI evaluated the impact of the project with a randomized control trial (RCT) design carried out by project staff with direct supervision of AVSI Regional MEAL experts.

The 320 eligible youth were randomly assigned to one of two groups: treatment (immediate project participation) and control. All participants were asked to complete two surveys: a baseline survey conducted prior to randomization (February 2024) and a follow-up endline

survey conducted at the end of program delivery (November 2024). The control group received the communication that AVSI hopes to secure funding for a second cohort which would create an opportunity for them to participate in the future.
The surveys reviewed the socioeconomic conditions of project participants, particularly in relation to the project indicators. Net impact analysis was used to compare the two groups at endline.

Data Collection, Storage and Analysis. Each survey lasted about 60 minutes. AVSI survey enumerators administered the survey to each participant using tablets accessing a KoboToolbox-encoded questionnaire. A group of 8 experienced enumerators were recruited and trained through a 3-day training session. The whole data collection process was under the supervision of the AVSI in-country MEAL coordinator and incoming data were checked daily by the Regional MEAL Manager to ensure data quality and general oversight. The descriptive analysis of results was conducted using Microsoft Excel.

The enumerators had no knowledge of which youths had been selected to participate in the control group or project activities, nor were they privy to this information when conducting the endline survey.

Outcome Harvesting (Participatory Review of Unexpected Results): Towards the end of the project delivery, AVSI conducted an Action-Reflection exercise through Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with representatives of the participants and project staff to review unexpected and significant results of the project as per the point of view of the participants. This process was an opportunity to discuss lessons learned aimed at strengthening the adaptation of the WINGS+ model to the setting of North Kivu, DRC. Relevant questions were generated and added to the follow-up endline survey to measure any unexpected results and include them as additional evidence of the project's overall impact.

Ethical considerations. Participants were asked for their consent in writing, and identified with a unique ID. Such information was stored in protected servers and accessible only to a few selected AVSI staff. As per best practices, any other data sharing included only the unique ID and no other data that would allow the identity of participants to be traced.

Limitations. The main limitations of this study relate to the short time horizon of the intervention and the emergency context, both of which tend to influence the level of confidence in the estimations presented in this study. On account of a looming security threat in the country, we were forced to conduct the end-line evaluation one month earlier than the actual end of the project. This most likely led to an underestimation of impacts that take longer time to manifest, which itself makes the changes to be studied smaller hence more difficult to measure accurately. The emergency context, which led for instance to the suspension of the data collection in some days, may have contributed to the quality of data gathered. **For those reasons, the results described in these studies should be regarded as tendencies rather than exact measurements.**

Context and Participants

Context – Four focus Group discussions allowed us to gather qualitative information regarding the context of Goma during 2024. Notably, the parents of the youth supported by the project described a very harsh context, where youth were at continuous risk.

Living in Goma: Life-Threatening Risks, Conflict, and Social Disintegration

- The project was launched at a time when the youth of Goma faced high risk of being recruited into civil-defense forces fighting rebel groups near the city's outskirts or the criminal gangs terrorizing the city from within. This risk remains particularly high for young people from Goma's most dangerous neighborhoods, where many project participants live. In these rough areas, atrocities and exploitation occur daily.
- Apart from brief moments of social or religious gatherings, families in Goma often suffer hardships in isolation, with little support. Many fear opening up to anyone except close neighbors, especially due to deep-rooted ethnic tensions, as communities remain wary of families from rival tribes frequently engaged in conflicts in nearby regions.
- For months at a time, particularly during the dry seasons, most families in Goma rely on contaminated water. Young people, especially girls, spend several hours daily fetching polluted water. When official city water points fail, families must choose between paying a prohibitive price for clean water or buying cheaper but unsafe water transported from the lake by trucks. In many cases, girls are expected to contribute to the household by walking to the lake to collect water—despite the fact that much of Goma's waste, including hazardous materials, is dumped there.

<u>Struggling for Work: Unemployment, Exploitation, and Despair</u>

- Although most of the youth selected for the project had secondary school diplomas, they were unable to find jobs, lacked a sense of purpose in society, had low self-esteem, and survived through odd jobs without taking on real responsibilities. Many had no habit of planning for their future, saving money, or working toward meaningful goals.
- According to their parents, these young people spent most of their time on the streets with other unemployed youth, exposed to numerous risks, including delinquency, alcohol abuse, sexual exploitation, and violence. Such experiences are not only dangerous but fail to equip them with the behaviors and discipline needed to secure and maintain employment.
- A significant number of the targeted youth are orphans living with relatives, often treated as second-class family members. Many receive little to no support once they reach adolescence and, if unemployed, may even face outright mistreatment.
- Similar patterns of neglect, discrimination, and violence also affect people with disabilities, those with special needs, and minority groups.

<u>Becoming a Woman in Goma</u>

- Girls are not expected to prioritize education, as housework and small-scale trade are considered their most likely paths. Even when they do attend school, they are burdened with more domestic responsibilities than their male counterparts, making it harder for them to study regularly or seek employment.
- Unemployed youth have little to no voice in family decisions, further straining already tense relationships. In an attempt to escape this situation, some young women rush into relationships, only to find themselves trapped in the same cycle of dependence due to a lack of financial independence.

Participant Profile (160 participants; and 160 control group)

The participants in the program ranged in **age from 18 years to 26 years**.

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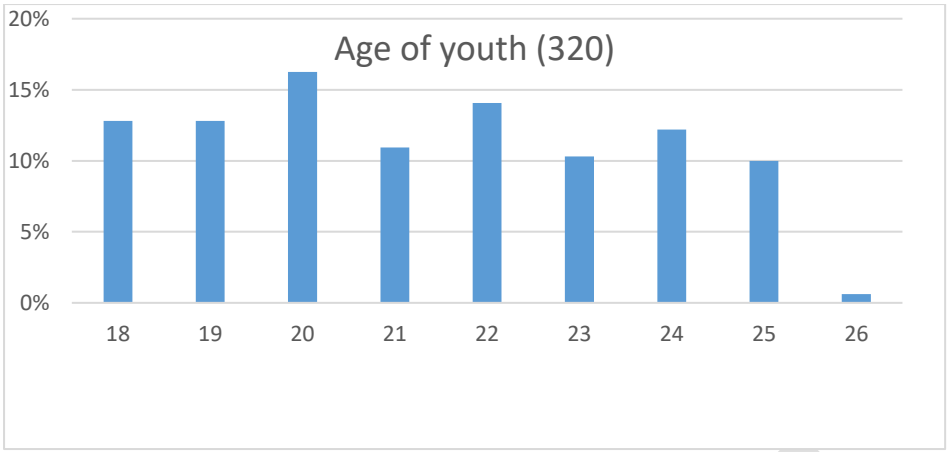
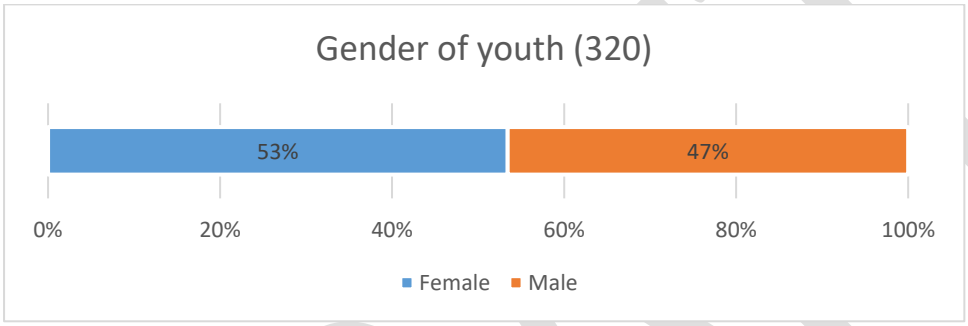


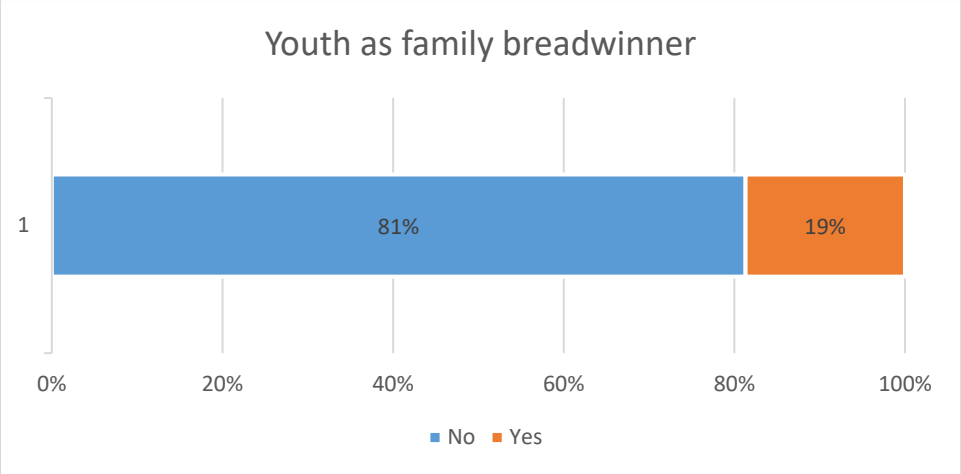
Slightly more than 50% of participants were female, notably **170 females as opposed to 150 males**.



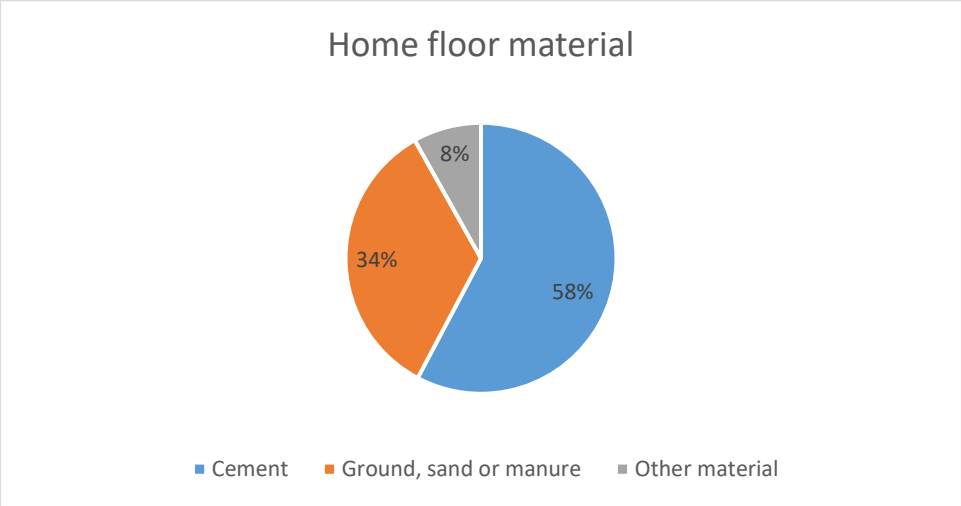
Most participants had at least nine years of schooling. Males had a very slightly higher level of schooling.

Highest level of education achieved?	Females	Males	**Total**
1 (primary)	1%	0%	0%
3 (primary)	2%	1%	1%
4 (primary)	1%	1%	1%
5 (primary)	2%	1%	1%
6 (primary)	7%	6%	7%
7 (secondary)	2%	4%	3%
8 (secondary)	8%	5%	7%
9 (secondary)	4%	6%	5%
10 (secondary)	11%	9%	10%
11 (secondary)	9%	13%	11%
12 (secondary)	40%	44%	42%
First cycle (tertiary)	9%	7%	8%
Second cycle (tertiary)	4%	4%	4%
Masters (tertiary)	1%	1%	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

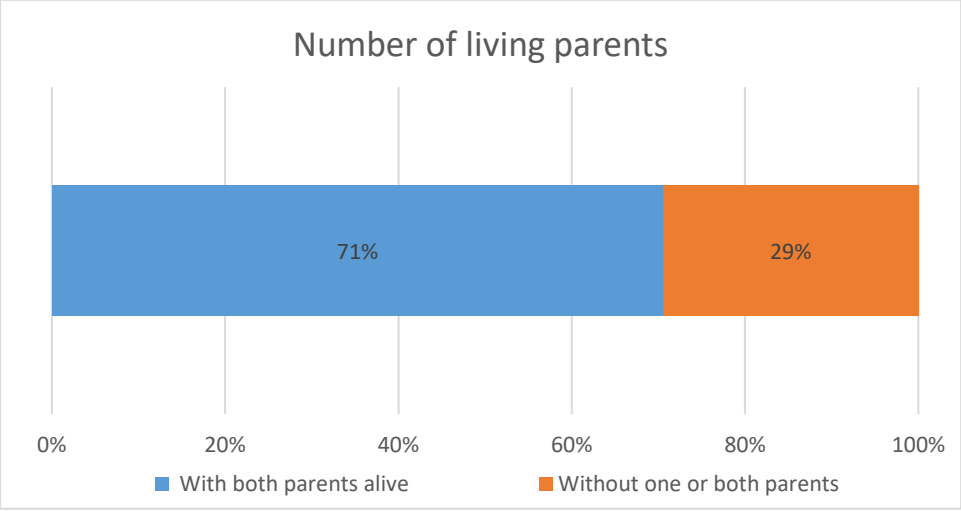
Despite their young age, **almost one in five was the breadwinner for their family**.



Less than 60% of the participants lived in a house with cemented floor – a clear indication of the level of poverty of the selected participants.

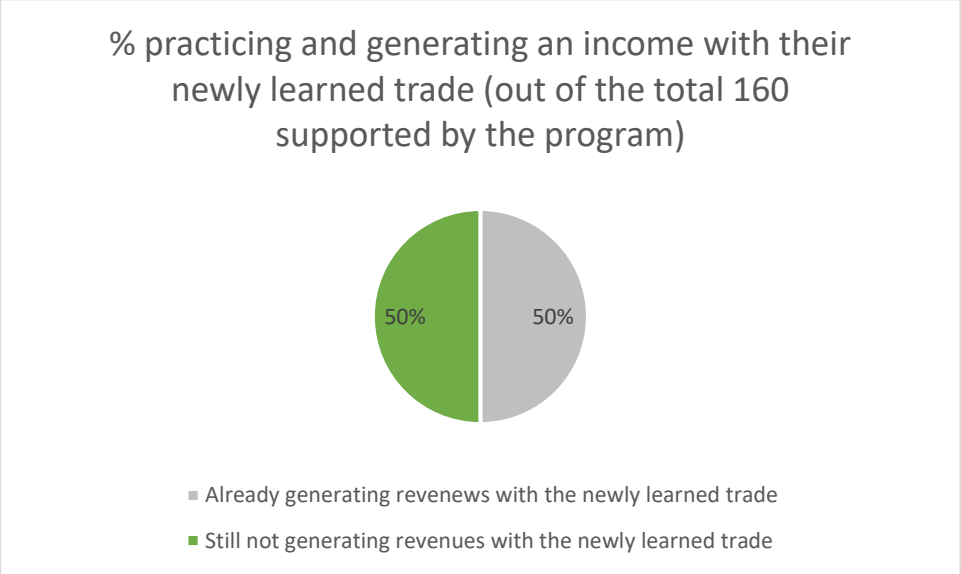


Almost a third of youth have lost one or both parents.



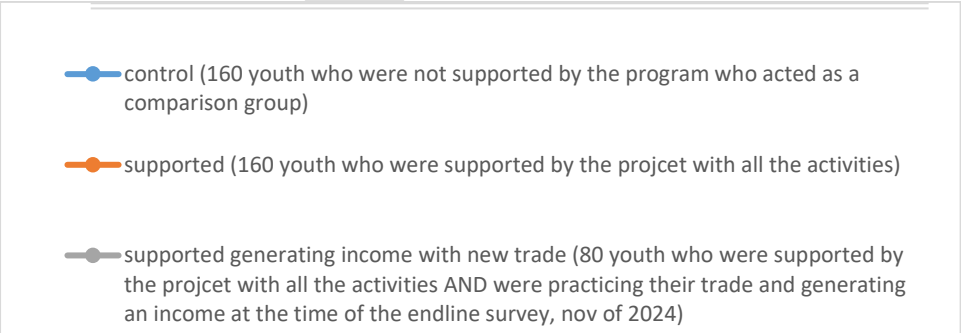
Results

The results described in the following section are disaggregated distinguishing two groups: youth “supported” by the program and the “control” group. Additionally, results were highlighted for a sub-group of the youth supported by the project: the youth who, at the time of the endline survey, were already practicing and generating an income with the trade they learned through vocational and on-the-job training, designated as “practicing and generating income with new trade”. In fact, in November 2024, when the endline survey was completed, only half of the youth supported by the program were generating an income in the practice of their new profession. The reason why so many students were still not generating an income with their new profession is that the courses and, on the job, training finished only in December 2024, and some professions cannot be practiced upon full completion of the training and licensing. For example, youth who were training to become automobile drivers did not receive driver’s licenses until having successfully completed their coursework.



As a result, in the remaining of these studies, figures will be presented for the following three groups.

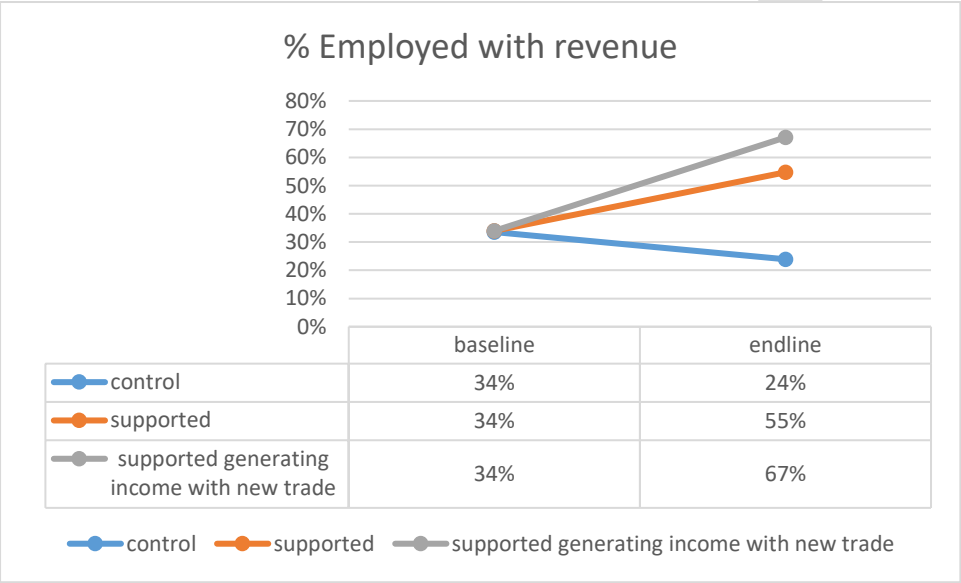
NB. The third group below (80 youth “supported generating income with new trade”) is a subset of, and is therefore included in, the second group (160 youth “supported”).



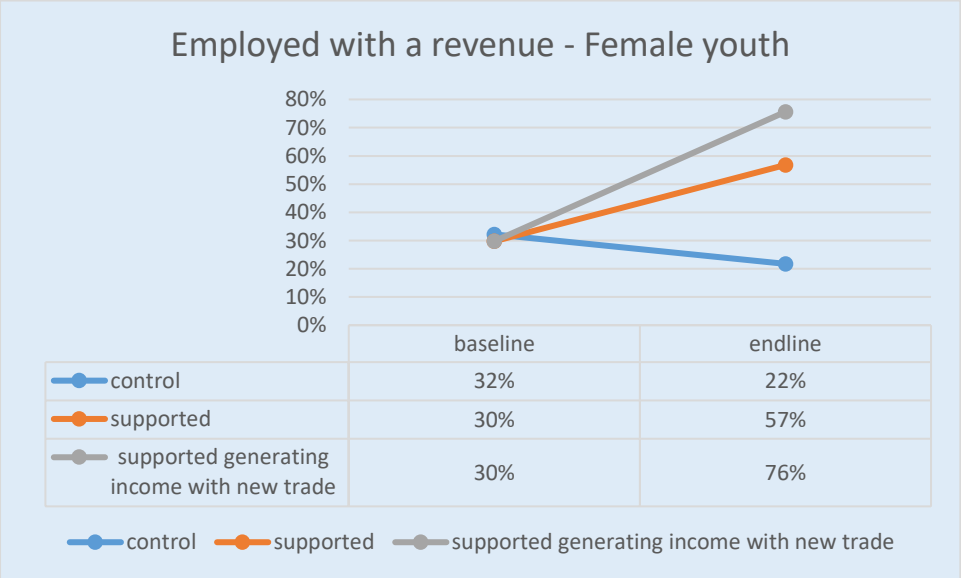
Economic Results

Employment, income, and economic perspectives.

Employment Rate Comparison: The employment rate among supported youth is higher than the control group. The net impact indicates that training led to a significant increase in employability.

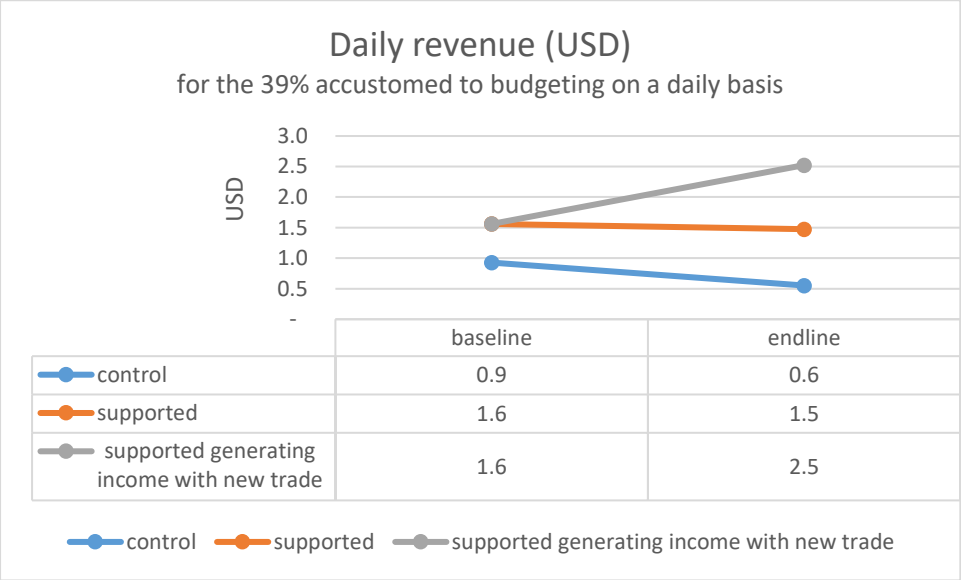


Gender-Based Employment Differences: Women in the supported group show increased employment rates compared to women in the control group, with a net impact analysis confirming the gender-specific benefits of training.



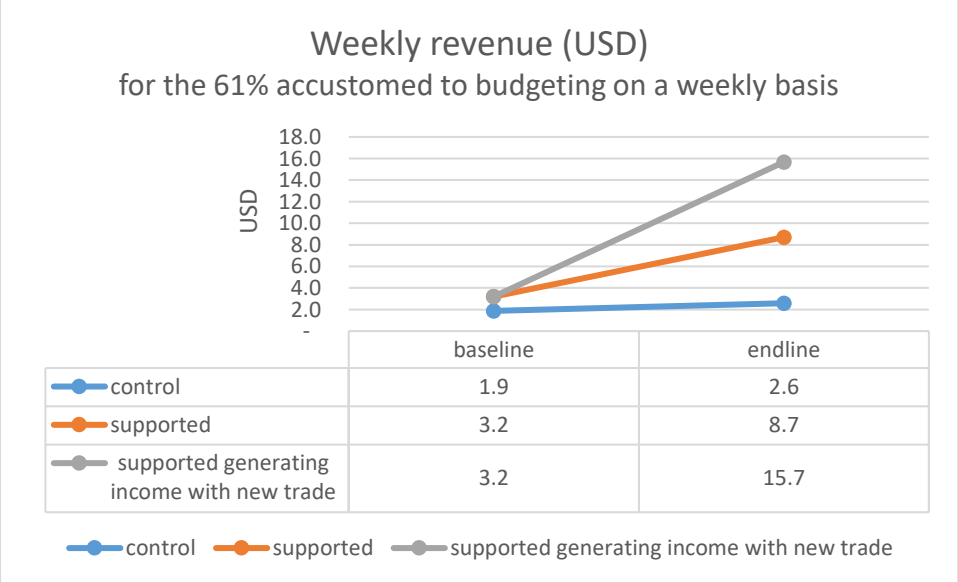
Income Distribution Among Youth: Income levels for the supported group surpass those in the control group. The net impact shows a notable increase in earnings post-training. It should be noted that the income was calculated on the basis of the income reported by the youth, assigning the value of 0 for those reporting being unemployed.

Among those accustomed to measuring their income (budgeting) on a daily basis, the increase in revenues is more visible among the youth who had already started to gain revenue by practicing their new trade. For the others who had been supported, the impact of the project is still visible insofar as their reduced income was less pronounced compared to the comparison group.



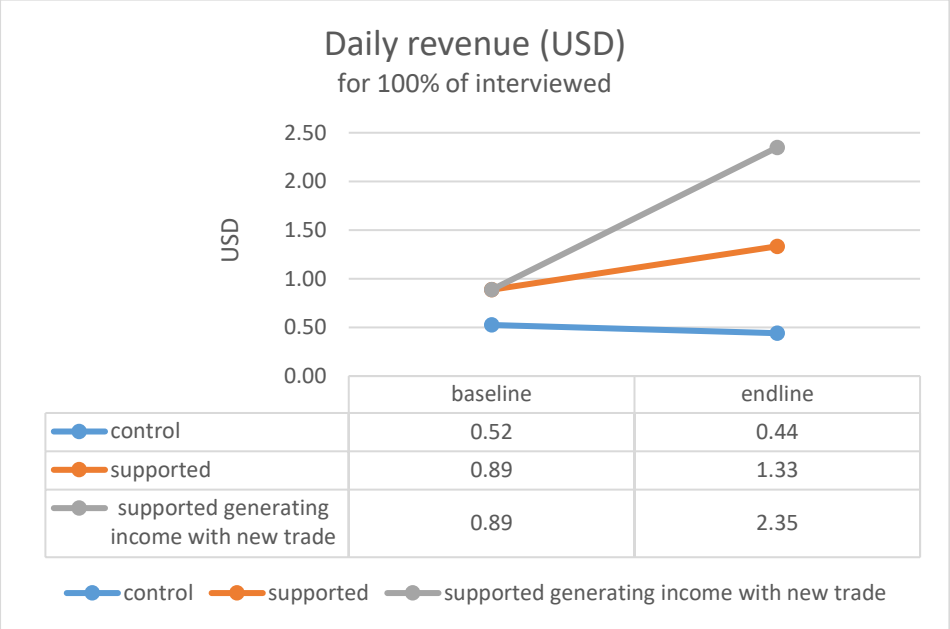
	baseline	endline
control	0.9	0.6
supported	1.6	1.5
supported generating income with new trade	1.6	2.5

Among those measuring their income on a weekly basis the impact of the project is very visible, with a threefold increase for the youth supported by the program as opposed to very limited increase for the control group.

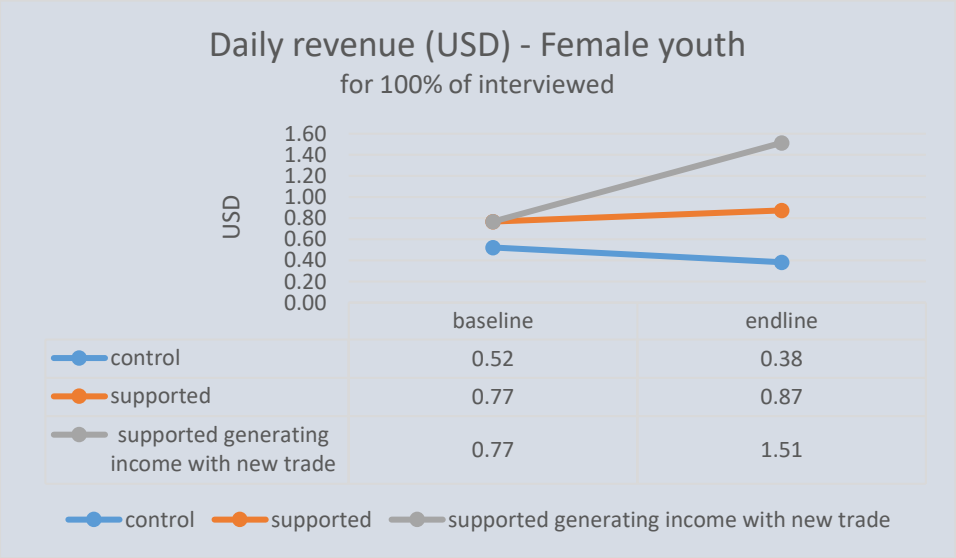


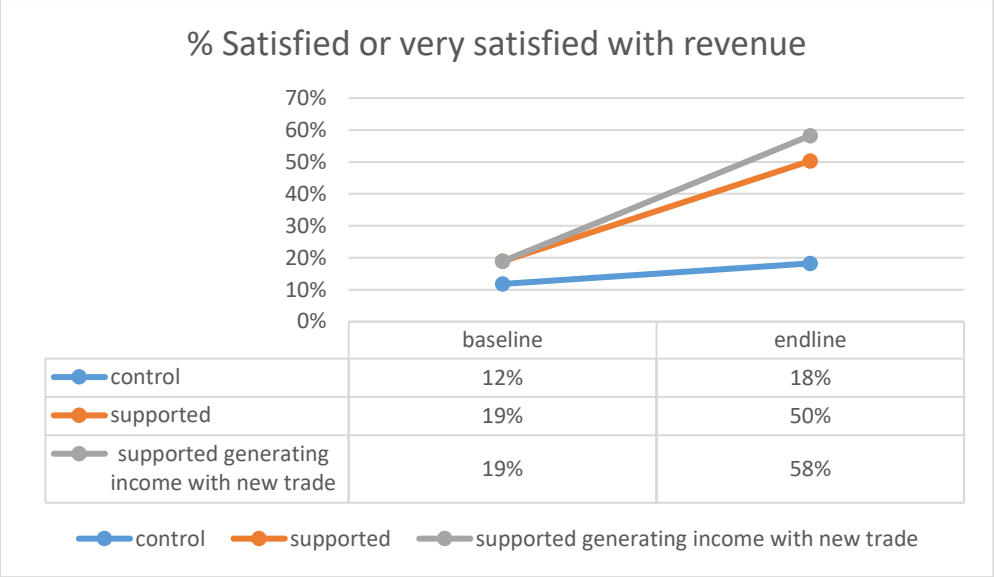
	baseline	endline
control	1.9	2.6
supported	3.2	8.7
supported generating income with new trade	3.2	15.7

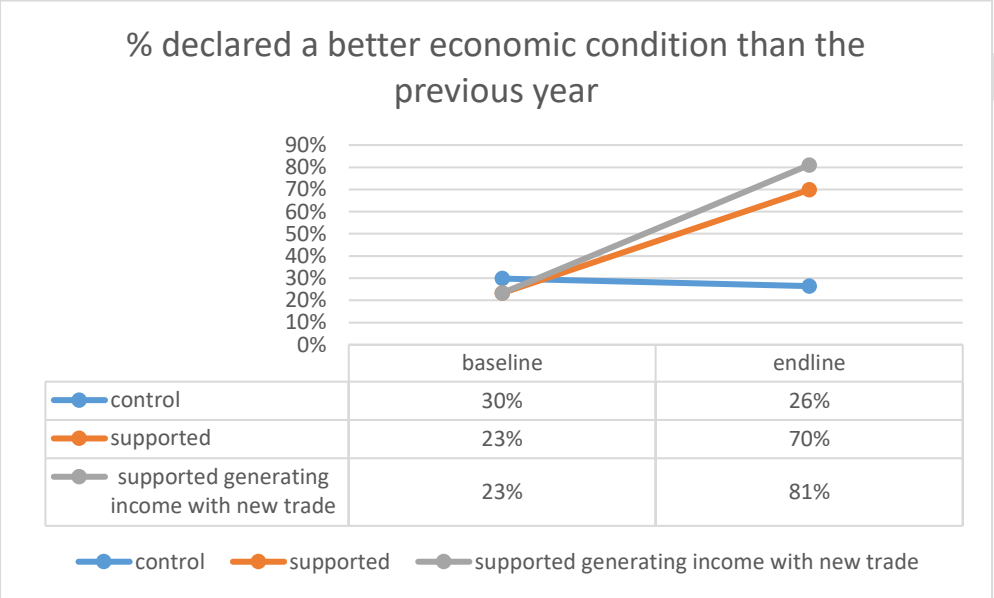
Combining the answers provided by the respondent, the increase in the income of the youth supported by the program is 50%, as opposed to a 16% decrease registered by the control group. For the youth already practicing and generating an income with their new trade the increase is of 165%, bringing all such youth above the line of extreme poverty set by SDG target 1.1 ($2.15 a day).

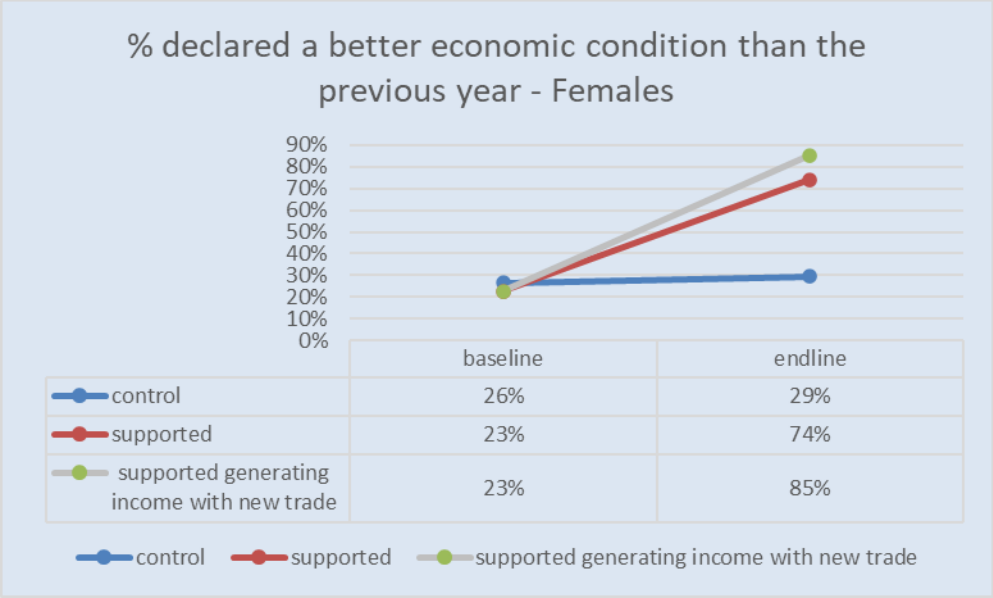


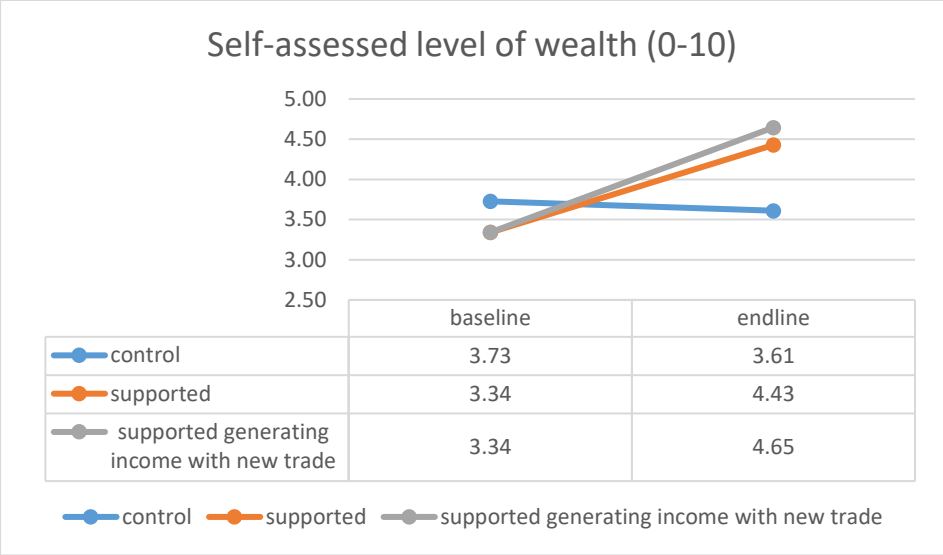
The impact on income for females is less pronounced but still significant (14%), especially when compared with the decreasing incomes of the control group (-27%). Particularly strong is the increase of income registered among the youth supported and already practicing their new trade.

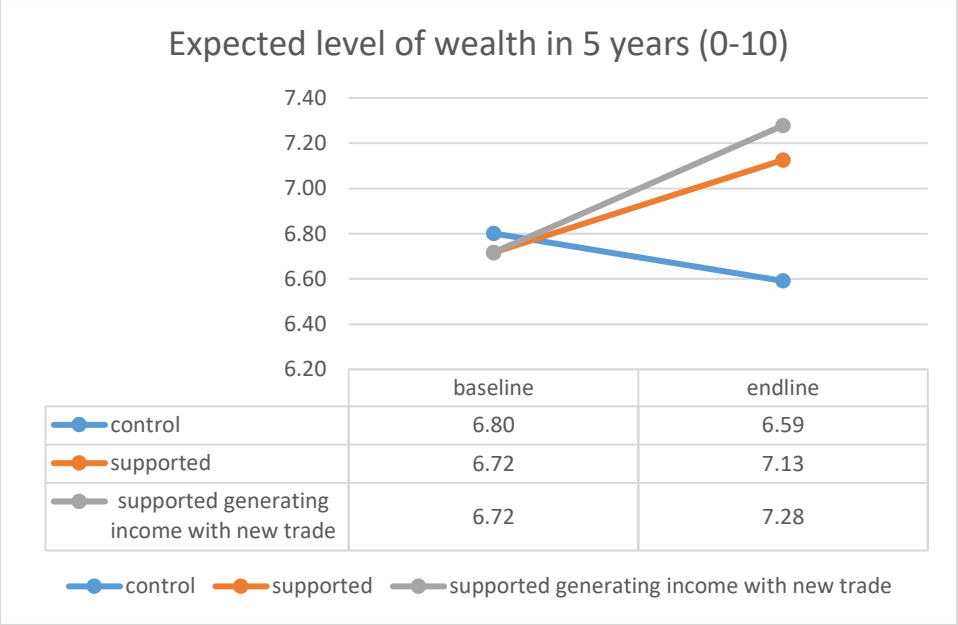



% Satisfied or very satisfied with revenue
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
baseline
endline
control
12%
18%
supported
19%
50%
supported generating income with new trade
19%
58%
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade


% declared a better economic condition than the previous year
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
baseline
endline
control
30%
26%
supported
23%
70%
supported generating income with new trade
23%
81%
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade

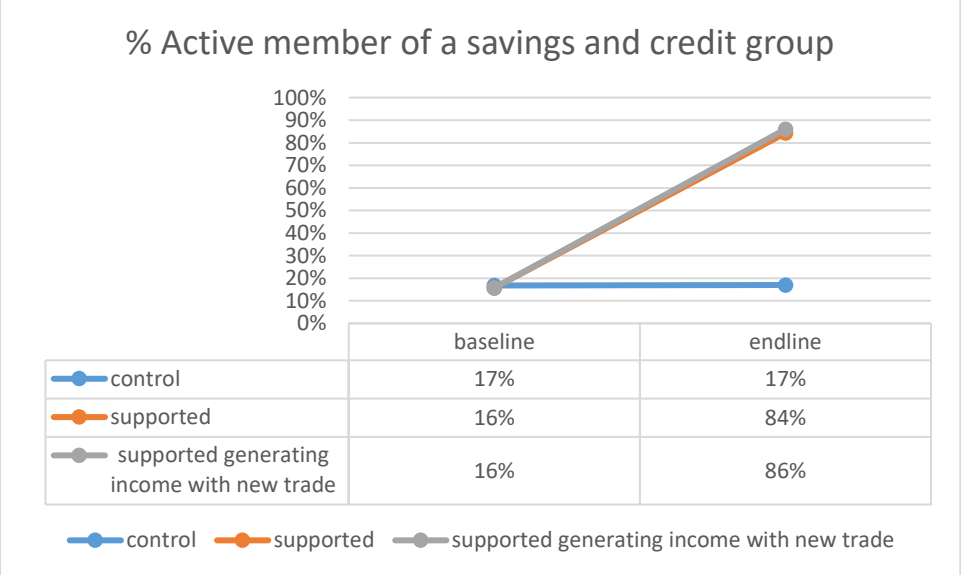

% declared a better economic condition than the previous year - Females
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
baseline
endline
control
26%
29%
supported
23%
74%
supported generating income with new trade
23%
85%
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade


Self-assessed level of wealth (0-10)
5.00
4.50
4.00
3.50
3.00
2.50
baseline
endline
control
3.73
3.61
supported
3.34
4.43
supported generating income with new trade
3.34
4.65
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade

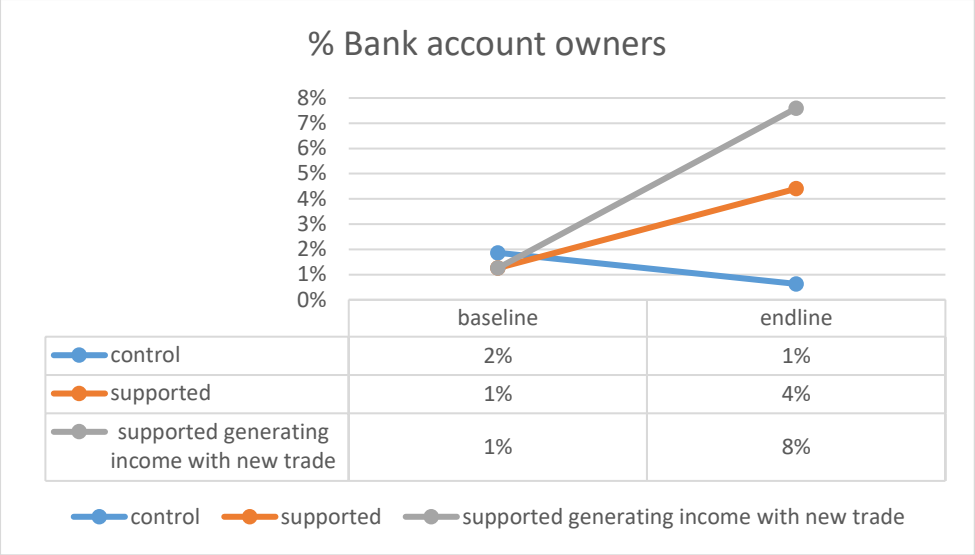


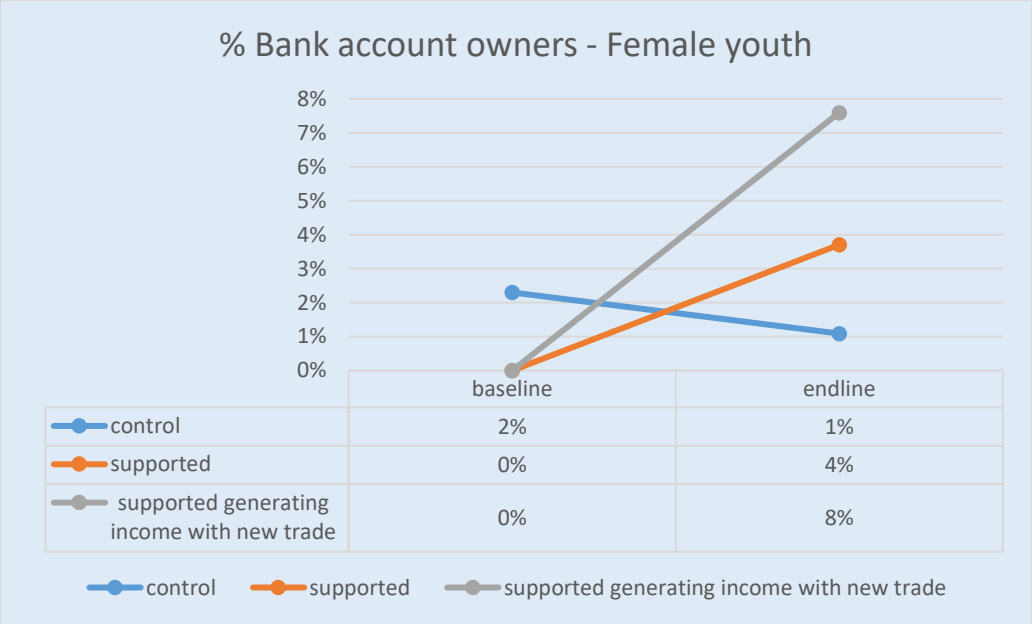
Access to savings

Savings Rate Across Groups: The savings rate is significantly higher among the supported youth, with a strong net impact indicating increased financial resilience. It should be noted that while 100% of supported youth were participating in saving and credit groups, some 16% of them had none of their earned income available and were not yet considered an active member.



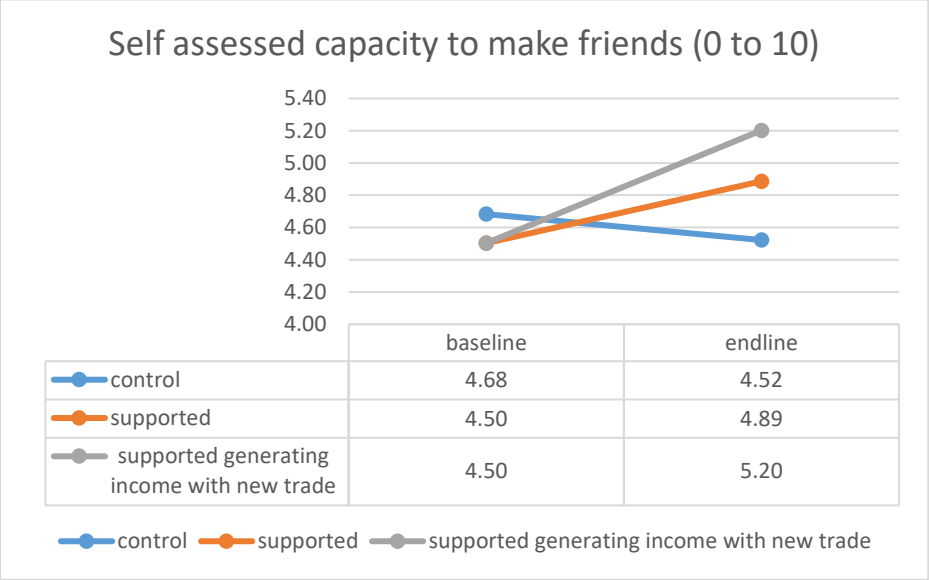
Access to Credit and Financial Services: Program participants demonstrate improved access to financial services, with net impact calculations showing a considerable advantage over the control group.

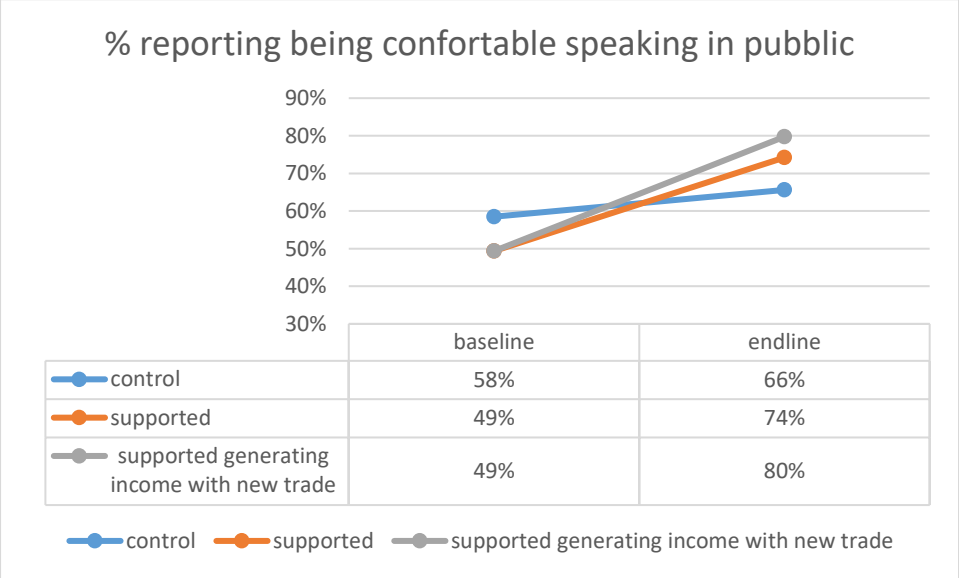

% Bank account owners
8%
7%
6%
5%
4%
3%
2%
1%
0%
baseline
endline
control
2%
1%
supported
1%
4%
supported generating income with new trade
1%
8%
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade


% Bank account owners - Female youth
8%
7%
6%
5%
4%
3%
2%
1%
0%
baseline
endline
control
2%
1%
supported
0%
4%
supported generating income with new trade
0%
8%
control
supported
supported generating income with new trade

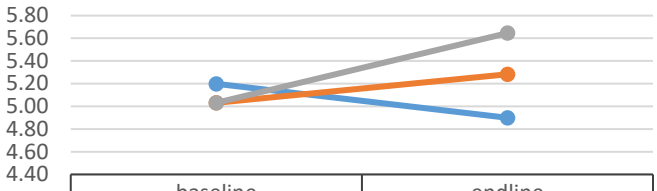
Social Results

Leadership and social skills





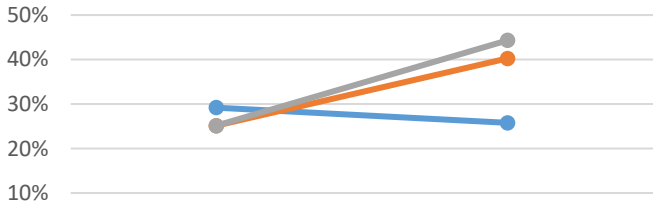
Self-assessed level of respect recognized by the community (0-10)



	baseline	endline
control	5.20	4.90
supported	5.03	5.28
supported generating income with new trade	5.03	5.65

control supported supported generating income with new trade

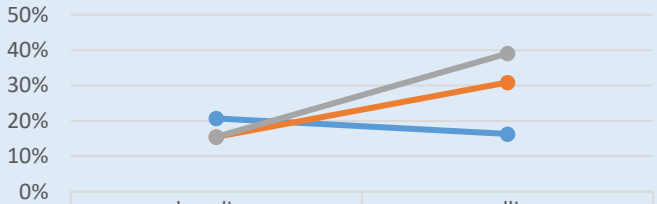
Considers him/herself a community leader



	baseline	endline
control	29%	26%
supported	25%	40%
supported generating income with new trade	25%	44%

control supported supported generating income with new trade

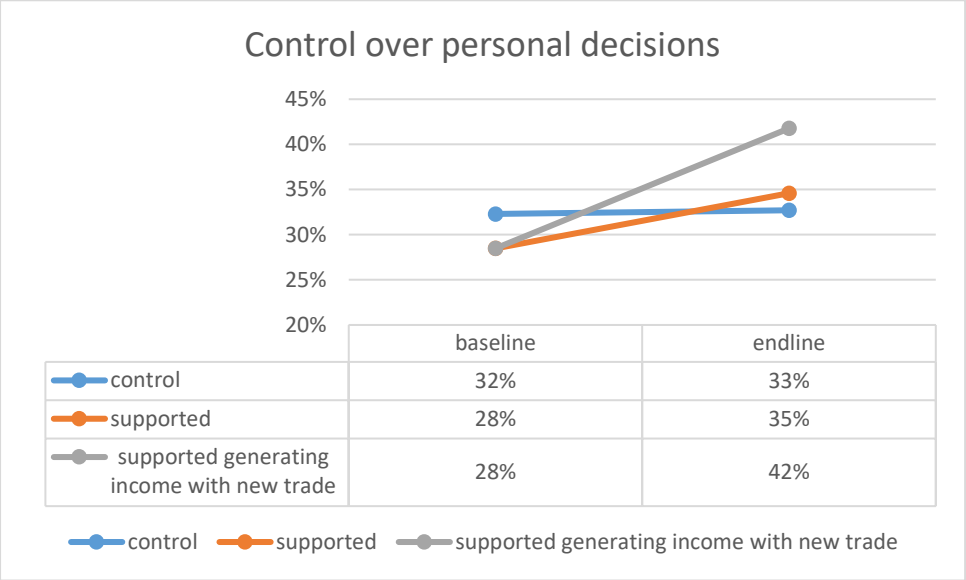
Considers him/herself a community leader - Female youth



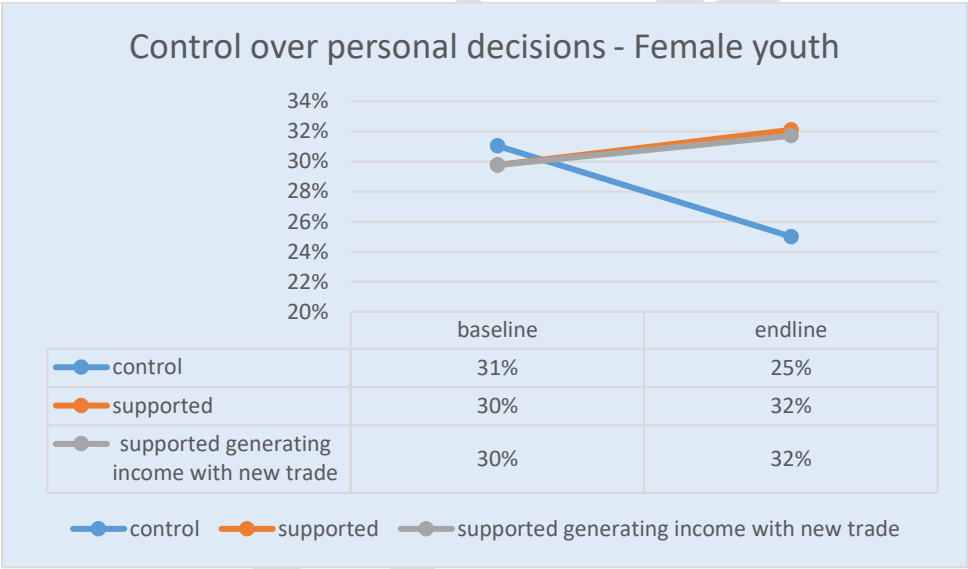
	baseline	endline
control	21%	16%
supported	15%	31%
supported generating income with new trade	15%	39%

control supported supported generating income with new trade

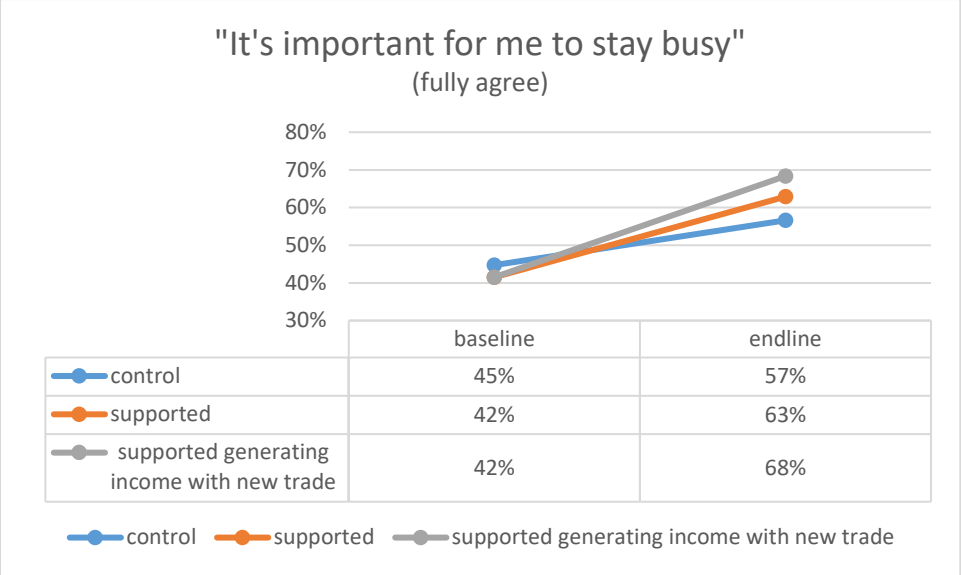
Agency and attitudes



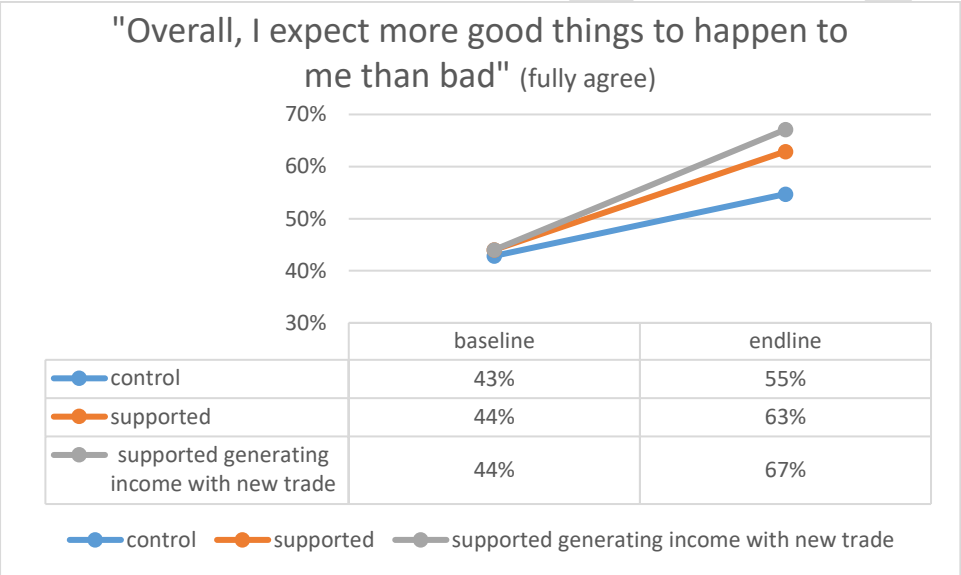
	baseline	endline
control	32%	33%
supported	28%	35%
supported generating income with new trade	28%	42%



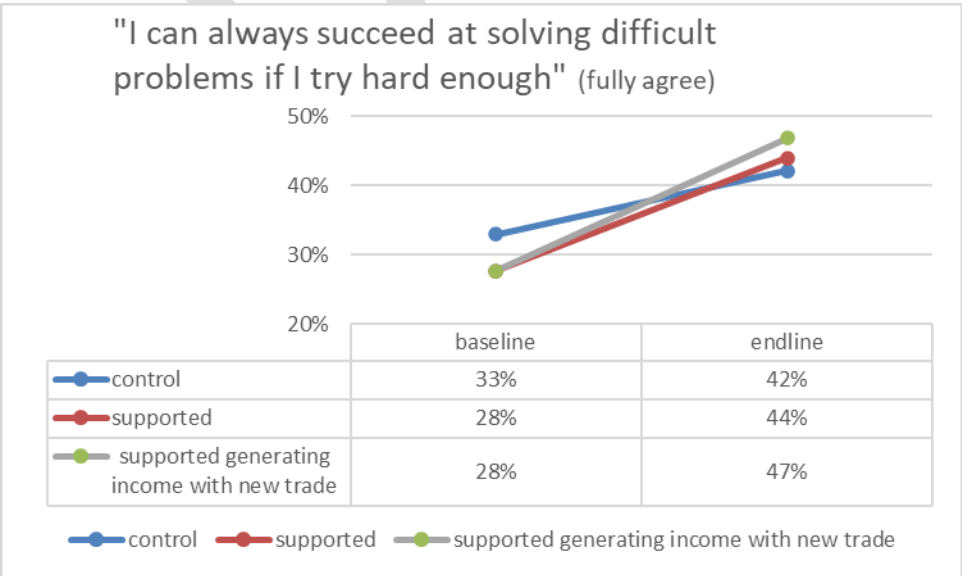
	baseline	endline
control	31%	25%
supported	30%	32%
supported generating income with new trade	30%	32%



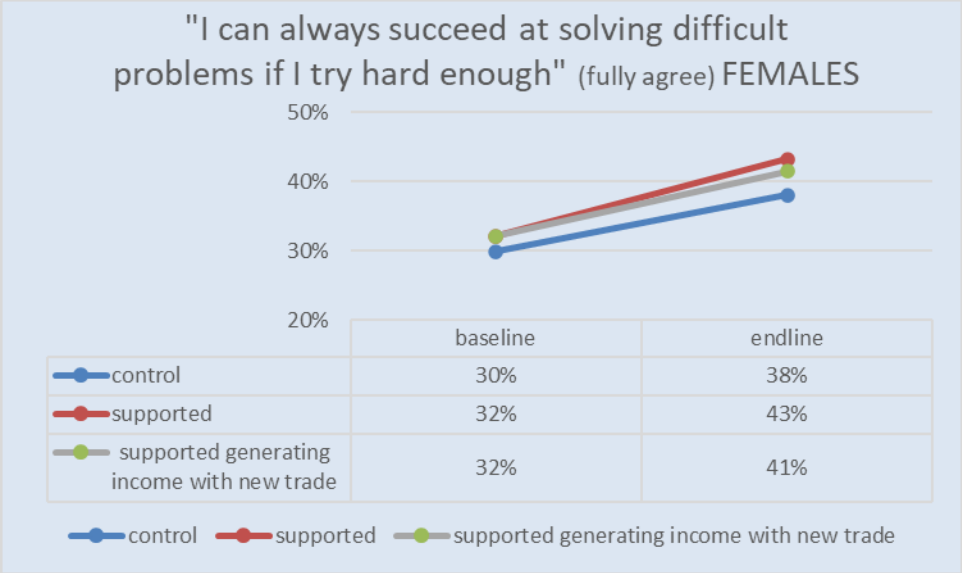
	baseline	endline
control	45%	57%
supported	42%	63%
supported generating income with new trade	42%	68%



	baseline	endline
control	43%	55%
supported	44%	63%
supported generating income with new trade	44%	67%

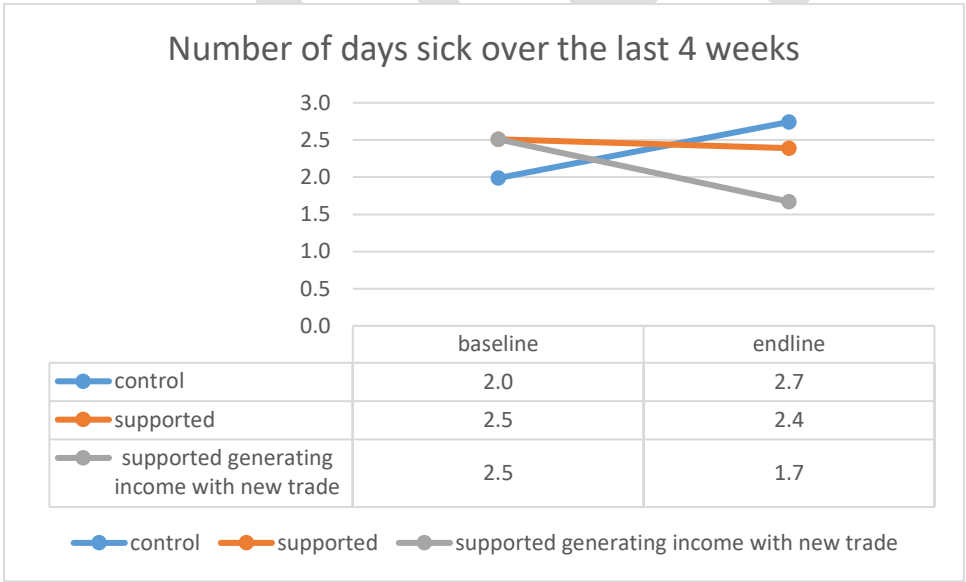


	baseline	endline
control	33%	42%
supported	28%	44%
supported generating income with new trade	28%	47%



Health

Health Outcomes by Employment Status: Improved financial conditions among employed youth correlate with better health outcomes, reinforced by net impact analysis.



AVSI Areas of Operations

Latin America and the Caribbean Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela **Africa** Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Libya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda **Middle East** Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria **Europe** Albania, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine **Asia** India, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Philippine

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People for development