WHAT IS AT STAKE?

- Adolescence, from age 10-19, is a critical period of mental physical, social and educational development. It is during this phase that children’s values, behaviours and skills are developed and entrenched. Adolescents therefore require special attention, protection and guidance, as they take on more responsibilities, and search for new experiences and independence.

- While adolescents are generally viewed as agents of change, the country’s high levels of violence, HIV and alcohol and drug use - underpinned by a context of poverty, inequality and unemployment - are posing huge challenges to adolescent development.

- This is especially true for adolescent girls and young women, who face particular challenges due to harmful gender norms which increase their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and school drop out.

- The poor quality of education outcomes means that even though most adolescents go to school, they are not necessarily learning what is required to support their future.

- Unless South Africa manages to alleviate these challenges and generate a caring and nurturing environment for growth, many adolescent girls will be hindered from fulfilling their potential and developing into productive members of society.

- Investing in adolescent girls and young women is therefore a priority, for the girls themselves, as well as for the future of the country.

HOW DOES UNICEF HELP?

With over 70 years of experience working for children’s rights and well-being, UNICEF brings together evidence from across the globe to advise governments and partners on how best to support adolescents and deliver effective programmes at scale. By combining technical expertise on health, education and social protection, UNICEF South Africa helps to collect evidence; promote quality dialogue with young people and their communities; identify solutions; and ensure national strategies and programmes to support adolescents, and especially girls, are based on what works. By considering all aspects of the adolescent’s life, UNICEF helps to design holistic programmes that aim to integrate action across government departments, development partners, civil society and communities. While deliberately focusing on the most vulnerable and deprived communities in the country, UNICEF provides the South African Government with technical assistance to strengthen policy frameworks and systems, and ensure appropriate services reach all adolescent girls and young women in need.
WHAT ARE WE DOING?

With support and encouragement from caring adults, as well as policies and opportunities that respond to their needs, adolescents girls have the ability to break long standing cycles of inequality, discrimination and violence.

The Government of South Africa is prioritizing girls and young women’s empowerment through the “She Conquers” campaign. Launched in 2016, the campaign focuses on preventing HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies, school drop-out and sexual and gender-based violence; and promoting economic opportunities and employment among girls and young women. In support of “She Conquers”, UNICEF works with Government and partners to facilitate a strategic and responsive approach to the development of adolescent girls that delivers concrete results. Key objectives are to:

- Create protective and nurturing environments at home, in school and in communities
- Provide essential information and life skills based education to support adolescent girls and young women in making informed decisions and choices about their health, their sexuality, their education and their future
- Provide essential services required for adolescent girls to develop and thrive: quality education, adolescent-friendly health services and social assistance
- Collect data and conduct research to provide evidence on what is or is not working, and support Government and partners to review policies and fast track action that works

A primary goal of all UNICEF-supported initiatives is to work closely with Government and partners to reach communities and service providers; educate them on the rights and needs of adolescents; and develop their capacity and understanding.

This is reflected in efforts to strengthen sexual and reproductive health, and HIV prevention and treatment for adolescents, including in schools, and ensure educators and health care workers respect and assure confidentiality. New technology platforms such as Vizool Eyes to engage with adolescents who are living with HIV, take into account the evidence that having hope and future plans helps adolescents adhere to their HIV medication. UNICEF is also working with Government and partners to promote youth-friendly care and support to pregnant teenagers both during and after pregnancy, and ensure they stay in school. This helps teen mothers to take care of themselves and their babies, while safeguarding their own future in terms of education and employment.

Tailored support to families in need is delivered through Isibindi and Safe Parks, Government-led programmes that are supported by UNICEF and other partners. Unemployed community members are recruited and trained as child and youth care workers to deliver holistic family strengthening services in disadvantaged communities. Through a combination of safe spaces for recreation, family visits, training of caregivers, skills building activities, advocacy with community leaders, and referrals to grants and protection services, Isibindi is reducing violence, strengthening families and driving positive change in communities. Adolescents who were once abused, neglected or disempowered are finding love, hope and opportunities for the future.

UNICEF is also helping Government to capitalize on the excellent social grants system in South Africa to strengthen the linkages between cash, care and protection for children and adolescents in need. By integrating case management across social service actors and tracking data in real time using the Child Status Index (CSI), children’s needs and vulnerabilities can be clearly identified, and referrals to critical health, education and protection services will be strengthened.

To develop life skills, prevent HIV and teenage pregnancy, reduce school dropout and strengthen resilience, UNICEF supports Government and partners to implement innovative sport for development programmes in schools across the country. These programmes not only promote adolescents’ physical and mental development, but also assist them to make smart choices in relation to their health, sexuality, education and future.

UNICEF also supports specific initiatives for girl empowerment, including Techno Girl, which helps girls from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue careers in technical fields where women are underrepresented, notably Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Others, such as U-Report, Young Reporters Network, iSchool Press Teams, and Shout Out for Health foster adolescent participation and leadership on issues such as school safety, quality education, gender based violence, and sexual and reproductive health. These initiatives help adolescents to know their rights, and strengthen their skills and confidence to advocate for them. They also ensure that policy makers hear the voices, needs and proposed solutions of adolescents directly, and make use of strategies and technologies that resonate with them. As such, they capitalize on the important role of adolescents and young people in shifting attitudes and norms and driving positive social change in their communities.
Adolescent girls empowerment and support to “She Conquers”: Focus areas and critical actions

**Prevent girls from getting HIV:**
- Test and scale up youth-friendly integrated HIV prevention, treatment, and support package for adolescents, including: Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for adolescent girls at high risk of HIV; prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and holistic support for teen mothers; and promotion of digital innovations, including Vizool Eyes – online engagement portal to strengthen HIV treatment adherence and improve health outcomes for adolescents.

**Reduce gender-based violence at home, in communities and in schools:**
- Shift attitudes and social norms related to HIV and teenage pregnancy by changing service provider attitudes and prejudices around adolescent sexuality and engaging young people to raise their voices through Shout Out for Health and other youth participation initiatives.

- Increase access to family strengthening services for vulnerable households through Isibindi home visits that provide tailored support to families and enhance child protection; and positive parenting programmes such as Sinovuyo, which focuses on ensuring nurturing care for adolescents, and MenCare which promotes the role of men in caregiving.

- Expand the number of safe spaces in disadvantaged communities through Safe Parks - safe spaces for children and adolescents to play, do homework, learn skills, access psychosocial support, and receive a meal - by establishing social compacts that combine the efforts and resources of Government, civil society, private sector and the community.

- Promote an integrated case management approach that uses the digitized Child Status Index (CSI) to identify and prioritize the most at-risk children and adolescents and involves a holistic assessment of their needs; development of a tailored action plan; support and referrals across education, health and child protection services to implement the plan; and a process of review and adaptation where necessary to ensure the plan continues to address the child’s needs.

- Strengthen child and survivor-centred justice, including increasing access to and quality of sexual offences courts for child victims and witnesses of violence.

- Ensure safety in schools through implementation of the School Safety Framework, a diagnostic tool for schools which provides standard guidelines that help schools to develop, implement and monitor school safety plans and promote positive discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment in schools.

- Engage adolescents and young people to speak out and change attitudes and social norms related to violence, HIV and gender equality through iSchool Press Teams and Young Reporters Network as well as through U-Report - a mobile platform to amplify the voice of young people on issues that concern them.

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**Keep girls in schools:**
- Transform schools into Child Friendly Schools - inclusive centres of learning, care and support; and eliminate barriers to learning, such as violence in schools; inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene - including menstrual hygiene; through implementation of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme (CSTL), and building partnerships with parents, learners and community stakeholders.

- Build resilience, leadership and life skills of adolescent girls through Sport and Music for Development programmes, and Girls Education Movement (GEM) clubs, which aim to build leadership skills and support girls to be proactive in ensuring their own educational progress. Boys participate in Boys Education Movement (BEM) clubs as partners who foster girl empowerment and help to promote gender equality in education and in society as a whole.

**Prepare girls for higher education and employment:**
- Improve quality learning outcomes in core subjects, especially reading and math, through scale up of evidence-based models and strategies (early grade reading and numeracy, regular assessment, focus on learning deficits, drop-out prevention, mobile learning); and strengthening of teaching quality through innovation and ICT.

- Promote access to higher education and employment in technical fields through Techno Girl which involves mentoring and job shadowing in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), as well as in-school support for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

The National Development Plan: Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals put forth clear targets to support adolescent development and girl empowerment in South Africa. These commitments can only be achieved through collective effort by all sectors of society. UNICEF continuously seeks and establishes unique partnerships to drive positive change for individual adolescent girls as well as their families and communities. Through collaboration with Government, the private sector, bilateral donors and civil society, UNICEF builds on the knowledge, expertise and innovation of each to ensure the most effective and efficient use of combined resources. By uniting with UNICEF, you gain a credible and respected partner who can support a comprehensive and results focused corporate social investment (CSI) strategy that makes a lasting difference for adolescent girls and helps them to shape South Africa's future.