WHY? GIRLS RISK BEING LEFT BEHIND

South Africa has made great strides towards achieving gender equality in education. There is almost full gender parity in primary and secondary school enrollment and attendance. However, despite concerted efforts and sound policies, gender inequality continues to persist. Girls and young women have poorer education outcomes, receive lower wages, face pervasive violence at home and in schools, often fall pregnant, and are up to eight times more likely to become infected with HIV than boys their age. National policies and campaigns such as “She Conquers” recognize the urgent need to empower young women by ensuring they stay in school and providing them with training and employment opportunities.

WHAT? TECHNO GIRL

The Techno Girl Programme is an innovative job shadowing programme that supports the above objectives by strengthening girls’ entry and learning in technical fields the economy requires: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Supported by UNICEF, the Uweso Trust and the Government of South Africa, Techno Girl works through a public-private partnership and seeks to reduce the skills shortage while contributing to the promotion of gender equality in these male-dominated fields. It encourages girls from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue careers in STEM by giving them first-hand, real-world experience, and providing educational support and guidance throughout their tertiary education.

“I was exposed to different careers and I learnt so much from them. It gave me the opportunity to meet with successful women who were willing to empower other young women”
– Patience Mphuthi

HOW? MENTORSHIP AND SKILLS

Girls, aged 15-18 years, are selected based on academic merit and placed (during their school holidays) with companies in technical career fields and occupations were women are currently under-represented. Tailored to each company, the programme involves mentoring and job shadowing with key employees during three consecutive holiday periods annually over a period of three years. Currently more than 200 companies operating in the STEM fields are participating in Techno Girl.

“Techno Girl was a mind opener” - Kgomotso Gumede

The programme combines technical learning and mentorship with life skills education, and empowers girls to make informed choices to prevent HIV, teenage pregnancy and gender based violence. The combination of technical and life skills enables a smooth transition for each girl from school to the world of work and adulthood.
WHO? UNICEF, GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS

UNICEF has been supporting the Techno Girl Programme since its inception in 2006. More than a decade later, Techno Girl has expanded more than 10-fold, and is embraced by the Department for Women, the Department of Basic Education, and the South African State Information Technology Agency (SITA) as a critical component of South Africa’s education programme. Since its inception over 700 companies have participated in the programme. UNICEF continues to support Techno Girl through strategic guidance, technical advice, raising funds, mobilizing new corporate partners and documenting the programme’s results and impact.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Since its inception, over 10,000 girls from underprivileged communities across all nine provinces of South Africa have benefited from Techno Girl. This year alone, 3,000 girls are actively participating in the programme.

“(Techno Girl) enabled me to unlock my full potential and encouraged me to do better academically” - Abelina Mokgamo

An alumni association was launched in 2013 in order to provide additional support and guidance to girls who pursue higher education studies as well as track their progress. Alumni are also assisted to develop leadership skills and serve as role models to younger girls who participate in the Techno Girl programme.

“Techno Girl has, no doubt, increased my confidence in taking up Science as a girl child. I believe I can do anything to which I put my mind” - Koketso Mbewe

Girls who have been through Techno Girl claim to have increased knowledge and understanding of the importance of STEM career fields; improved skills and attitudes to challenge submissive behaviour and communication patterns that hinder women’s success in STEM careers; and increased capacity to successfully complete school-based STEM subjects. Many say that the programme has influenced their choices of study and employment.

“Techno Girl has changed my life and taught me that no job is too tough for females” - Tshegofatso Laka

Currently 1000 alumni are attending institutions of higher learning, of which 76 of them are in their final year. Fifty-seven girls have entered the world of work and become business leaders in their own right. Techno Girl helps girls to stay in school, marry later, delay childbearing, and earn better incomes. They are poised to become future leaders, to advance social justice, support economic development, and combat poverty. Techno Girl helps not only the individual girl, but also her family, her community and the nation.

WHAT NEXT? SCALING FOR THE FUTURE

A 2014 evaluation of the programme revealed that the simplicity of Techno Girl is a key factor of its success since it facilitates replication, scale and sustainability. In view of its achievements, Techno Girl is considered to be a priority programme for expansion, which will require engaging up to 500 new corporate partners as well as increasing the number of girls who are included in current company programmes. Action will also be taken to reach out to rural girls while enhancing the reach in townships. The alumni component will also be strengthened to ensure they act as champions for the programme within their workplaces, former schools and immediate communities.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

By supporting Techno Girl, companies have the opportunity to demonstrate private sector leadership in South Africa; enhance employees’ skills and motivation through mentoring Techno Girls; and contribute to developing a pool of skilled young women for future employment. In doing so, they directly support South Africa’s equity, equality and empowerment agenda as well as the National Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goals.

CONTACT US

To explore concrete and tailored partnership opportunities, please contact:

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RESULTS

- Over 10,000 girls have participated in the Techno Girl programme
- Many more than 200 companies in the STEM fields are currently participating in Techno Girl
- Over 1000 Techno Girl alumni are attending institutions of higher learning