EVALUATION REPORT

Undaunted/Breaking the Glass Ceiling Programme

External Evaluation

UNICEF SOUTH AFRICA
AUGUST 2025

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Undaunted/Breaking the Glass Ceiling Programme - External Evaluation

United Nations Children's Fund South Africa

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PREFACE

The Undaunted/Breaking the Glass Ceiling Programme – External Evaluation presents an independent assessment of a multi-year initiative led by UNICEF South Africa, in partnership with the Department of Basic Education and several local organizations, to address persistent and gendered barriers facing adolescent girls in South Africa's education system. Conducted after the conclusion of the programme's implementation (2018–2023), this evaluation systematically examines the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of interventions aimed at improving access, retention, and achievement for girls—particularly in the areas of HIV/AIDS awareness, STEM education, and menstrual health management. The evaluation draws on a mixed-methods approach, incorporating document reviews, interviews, focus group discussions, and beneficiary surveys, to generate evidence and lessons learned for future programming. The findings are intended to inform stakeholders and guide decision-making. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team and do not necessarily reflect UNICEF positions.

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This report was prepared by KPMG International Development Advisory Services, specifically by Ingrid Legrand Gjerdset, Rebecca Bushby, Lars Engen, Anise Gold-Watts, Jean Baxen, and Tronny Mawadzwa. The team gratefully acknowledges the guidance and support of the steering committee and UNICEF South Africa throughout the evaluation process. We extend our sincere thanks to all informants, particularly the beneficiaries, who generously shared their experiences and insights. Their contributions were invaluable in shaping the findings and recommendations of this report.

ACRONYMS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
GBEM	Girls and Boys Empowerment Movement
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GFPA	Girls Fly Programme in Africa Foundation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IP	Implementing Partner
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
LSA(s)	Learner Support Assistant(s)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MHM	Menstrual Health Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STI(s)	Sexually Transmitted Infection(s)
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR(s)	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Introduction

South Africa continues to face pervasive challenges in educational outcomes and attainment, with only 40% of learners completing their final year of schooling and alarming rates of dropout and low reading competencies. These educational challenges are compounded by deep socio-economic disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to learning materials, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Gender intersects with these barriers, as girls often face additional obstacles such as inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, and heightened risks of malnutrition and food insecurity. Despite achieving gender parity in school attendance rates for 14–18-year-olds, persistent issues with educational completion, quality, and gender-based violence remain. Health vulnerabilities, including high rates of HIV infection and adolescent pregnancy, further threaten girls' educational attainment and perpetuate cycles of poverty. Menstrual health management remains a significant barrier, with millions of girls missing substantial amounts of school due to lack of access to sanitary products and safe facilities. These challenges are set against a backdrop of entrenched inequality, with girls from disadvantaged backgrounds most affected.

The Undaunted Girls Empowerment Programme, also known as the "Breaking the Glass Ceiling programme", was a multi-sectoral initiative implemented by UNICEF South Africa in partnership with the Department of Basic Education and several implementing partners between February 2018 and December 2023. With a total budget of approximately USD 4 million, the programme aimed to address the persistent and gendered barriers facing adolescent girls in South Africa's education system.

The programme's overarching goal was to improve access, retention, completion, and learning achievement for girls by tackling social, health, and educational challenges that disproportionately affect them. The programme focused on three main result areas:

1. Awareness of risks and prevention of HIV, STIs and teenage pregnancy through comprehensive sexuality education, Expanding girls' opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM),
2. Support to increase knowledge and skills on menstrual health management (MHM).

The primary beneficiaries were adolescent girls aged 12 to 18 in secondary schools, with interventions also reaching boys, teachers, and broader school communities, particularly in under-resourced and rural areas. For some activities, beneficiaries also included primary school girls aged 9-13.

The Evaluation

The purpose of this final evaluation is to systematically assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the Undaunted Programme. The evaluation is intended to generate evidence and insights to inform future programme design, guide decision-making for similar interventions, and ensure accountability to stakeholders and donors. It also seeks to document lessons learned and best practices to support the long-term sustainability and potential scale-up of such initiatives.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess whether the implementation of the programme was in line with its planned outputs, results, and outcomes;
- Analyse the factors that may have influenced implementation, both positively and negatively;
- Collect data on outcomes that can be used for future comparisons and impact assessments;
- Document lessons learned on the implementation of the programme to support planning for similar interventions in the future.

The primary intended users of this evaluation are UNICEF South Africa, the Department of Basic Education, the Canadian National Committee for UNICEF (as the key donor), and the schools and communities that participated in the programme. The evaluation is also relevant for policymakers, implementing partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in girls' empowerment, education, and health in South Africa.

Methodology

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods, concurrent design to systematically assess the programme's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in line with OECD-DAC criteria. Data collection tools included a comprehensive document review, key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders such as donors, implementing partners, government officials, and school administrators, focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries and community members, and surveys with programme participants. The evaluation matrix, developed and refined during the inception phase, guided the alignment of evaluation questions with available evidence and data sources. Due to challenges in accessing former beneficiaries and incomplete programme documentation, the evaluation emphasized qualitative approaches and triangulated data sources to strengthen findings. Ethical approval was secured, and all data collection adhered to UNICEF and UNEG ethical standards, with particular attention to the protection of minors and vulnerable groups. Limitations included gaps in baseline data, incomplete monitoring records, and challenges in reaching a representative sample, which were mitigated through careful qualification of findings and transparent reporting of methodological constraints.

Findings

The evaluation found the following:

Relevance: The Undaunted Programme was relevant to the needs and priorities of adolescent girls in South Africa, particularly those facing intersecting vulnerabilities due to poverty, gender, disability, and rural location. The programme's focus on HIV/AIDS awareness, STEM education, and menstrual health management directly addressed persistent barriers to girls' educational participation and achievement. Its design and implementation were closely aligned with national policies and government priorities, including the South African Constitution, the National Development Plan 2030, and sectoral strategies for gender equality, health, and education, including the National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB and STIs 2017–2022. Stakeholder feedback, including from beneficiaries, confirmed that the programme's interventions—especially those related to menstrual health and HIV prevention—were valued and met needs, though some content risked repetition for certain groups.

Efficiency: Assessment of efficiency was constrained by incomplete financial data and a lack of systematic results reporting. While the programme eventually spent nearly all its budget, there were significant delays in implementation and expenditure, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic but also due to pre-existing administrative and logistical challenges. The use of existing government and school structures, local implementing partners, and co-financing arrangements likely improved cost efficiency. However, fragmented implementation, delays, and a lack of one programme-level unified results framework limited the programme's ability to maximize synergies and demonstrate value for money. Some activities, such as job shadowing in STEM, were resource-intensive and faced logistical barriers that reduced efficiency and reach, especially for rural and underprivileged girls.

Effectiveness: The programme achieved a number of its intended outputs, particularly in reaching large numbers of girls with awareness and skills-building activities across HIV/AIDS, STEM, and menstrual health. Implementing partners often exceeded their own targets in specific areas, such as job-shadowing placements and menstrual health education. However, the absence of clear, programme-wide targets and systematic monitoring limited the ability to assess achievement against overall objectives. The shift to online modalities during the pandemic enabled some continuity but also exposed digital divides, limiting effectiveness for the most marginalised. Beneficiary feedback indicated high satisfaction and perceived personal and academic benefits, though evidence of sustained behavioural change or long-term outcomes was less clear.

Impact: The programme generated a range of positive, intended impacts for beneficiaries. Some participants reported tangible outcomes, such as improved academic performance, job readiness, and reduced absenteeism. There were also self-reported signs of broader community impact, such as reduced stigma around menstruation and increased peer support. However, impacts on higher-level objectives—such as reduced HIV infection rates, increased retention, and gender parity in STEM—could not be robustly demonstrated due to data limitations and the lack of longitudinal tracking. Not all participants experienced positive impacts, and attribution to the programme is limited.

Sustainability: The programme was designed with sustainability in mind, integrating interventions into existing school curricula and government frameworks, and building capacity among teachers, peer leaders, and learner support agents. However, sustainability is threatened by reliance on external funding for coordinators and facilitators. The adaptability shown during the pandemic and the use of digital platforms offer potential for future scale-up, but persistent digital and resource divides may constrain long-term benefits. Partnerships were key to sustainability, but greater coherence and coordination are needed to institutionalize and expand successful approaches.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation of the Undaunted Programme highlights that strong policy alignment and integration into Department of Basic Education frameworks, such as the Life Orientation curriculum, were critical to achieving relevance, legitimacy, and potential scalability. However, these must be coupled with deeper institutional anchoring, wider educator coverage, and stronger community engagement to sustain benefits beyond donor funding. The programme also showed that awareness-raising needs complementary activities to drive lasting behaviour change, for example by pairing knowledge transfer with mentorship, peer leadership, and agency-building. Weak, fragmented monitoring and the absence of baseline and impact-level indicators limited the ability to measure longer-term outcomes. Additionally, persistent structural barriers, including including transport costs, menstrual product access, and digital divides, must be addressed as core design features to ensure equitable participation, particularly for rural and marginalised girls.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation, and given that the Undaunted Programme's implementation period has ended, the following recommendations have been developed for future implementation of similar programmes by UNICEF in South Africa.

Relevance: Strengthen future programming by building on the Undaunted Programme's strong policy alignment and contextual focus, ensuring that interventions remain directly responsive to the evolving needs of adolescent girls, especially those experiencing multiple vulnerabilities related to poverty, geography, and disability. Further prioritise integration within national curricula and government systems, but actively seek input from beneficiaries and underrepresented groups to avoid repetition and ensure that activities address real gaps in empowerment, knowledge, and participation.

Effectiveness: Enhance programme effectiveness by establishing consistent, robust monitoring systems that track achievement against clear, harmonized targets and outcome indicators for all implementing partners. Prioritise not only reach, but also the measurement of sustained behavioural, educational, and health changes, and complement knowledge-sharing with structured mentorship, agency-building, and peer leadership strategies that drive deeper and more durable results.

Efficiency: For improved efficiency, prioritise the development and maintenance of comprehensive, transparent financial tracking systems that clearly link expenditures to intended outcomes and allow for assessment of cost-effectiveness across activities and locations. Streamline programme delivery through coherent planning and budgeting, maximize the use of existing structures and local partnerships, and actively address logistical barriers (such as transportation and resource access) that limit participation for the most marginalized.

Impact: Build greater programme impact by designing unified monitoring and evaluation frameworks with SMART indicators that go beyond participation counts to capture actual changes in girls' lives, such as increased retention, improved health behaviours, and enhanced entry into STEM fields. Integrate baseline and follow-up assessments, actively monitor for unintended effects, and use participatory approaches (such as peer-led feedback) to adapt interventions and demonstrate their contribution to higher-level objectives.

Sustainability: To sustain benefits, deepen institutional anchoring by training multiple educators and support agents per school, embedding peer-led structures into governance systems, and ensuring ongoing advocacy and resourcing at both school and district levels. Broaden family and community engagement, secure co-financing or government commitments for critical inputs (e.g., menstrual products, digital access), and design for scalable replication by leveraging digital platforms and reinforcing links to national policies and stakeholder networks.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Undaunted Girls Empowerment Programme was a comprehensive initiative designed to address the persistent and gendered barriers facing adolescent girls in South Africa. The programme, also titled: "Undaunted - Breaking the Glass Ceiling", is for simplicity referred to as the Undaunted Programme throughout this evaluation[1].

The overarching goal of the Undaunted Programme was to improve access, retention, completion, and learning achievement for girls by tackling social, health, and educational challenges that disproportionately affect them. The programme recognizes that while South Africa has achieved near-universal school attendance and gender parity in primary education, girls continue to face high dropout rates after Grade 9, low learning outcomes, and significant risks related to gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and teenage pregnancy. These barriers are compounded by poverty, lack of access to menstrual health products, and entrenched social norms.

The objectives of the Undaunted Programme included:

- To use play-based and sport-for-development approaches to deliver a comprehensive life skills curriculum that addresses child protection, health, gender equality, and leadership.
- To ensure girls actively participate in both in-person and online life skills sessions, engaging in discussions on social issues such as gender-based violence, bullying, xenophobia, and SRHR.
- To equip girls with essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes for active citizenship, personal empowerment, and employability.
- To challenge girls to become leaders and agents of change in their schools and communities.
- To improve digital and media literacy skills, empowering girls to be responsible digital citizens and critical consumers of information.

The programme was a multi-sectoral initiative implemented by UNICEF South Africa in partnership with the South African government, primarily the Department of Education (DBE), and supported financially by the Canadian Natcom. The project was implemented through implementing partners, including MIET Africa, Girls Fly Africa, Agape and Afrika Tikkun, reporting directly to UNICEF, as well as the DBE. Please see table 1 below for an overview of stakeholders.

The programme was operational from February 1, 2018, to December 31, 2023, with a total budget of approximately USD 4,000,000 (see section 1.9 for more information on the budgets and expenditures). It reached schools across nine provinces of South Africa[2], with a particular focus on Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Gauteng, especially in non-fee-paying schools[3]. Upon the conclusion of the implementation phase, this final evaluation was commissioned to assess the programme's outcomes, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. The subject of the evaluation is the Undaunted Programme.

The primary beneficiaries of the programme were adolescent girls in secondary schools, especially those aged 12 to 18, with interventions also extending to boys, girls aged 9-13 and broader school communities. The initiative targeted both urban and rural settings, concentrating on areas where educational and gender disparities are most pronounced. The programme aimed to reach 100,000 girls for result area 1, 5,000 adolescent girls for result area 2, and 1,300,858 girls for result area 3.

The Undaunted Programme had three main result areas, under which the programme was implemented:

[1] Please note that several iterations of the name of the program have been located in various documents, as the name has changed throughout implementation or had different names in project agreements depending on the implementing partner.

- Result Area 1 focused on providing HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention in schools. This included the implementation of sexual and reproductive health services in schools and the delivery of youth leadership activities related to gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention. MIET Africa played a central role in these efforts, leading the implementation in schools and supporting youth leadership activities. The Department of Basic Education was a critical partner, ensuring that HIV/AIDS were integrated into the compulsory Life Orientation curriculum and facilitating the training of teachers and learner support agents. Agape also contributed by supporting the transition to online training and promoting online child safety.
- Result Area 2 aimed to provide girls with learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as job-shadowing opportunities and empowerment activities. Afrika Tikkun and Girls Fly Africa were the primary partners supporting this area, as well as Techno Girl Africa. They were responsible for recruiting underprivileged girls for job-shadowing, establishing in-school STEM coaching programmes, and providing additional education and psychosocial support for TechnoGirl alumni. The Department of Science and Innovation and the Department of Higher Education and Training provided additional support for scaling up STEM activities and integrating digital literacy components.
- Result Area 3 was dedicated to supporting Menstrual Health Management (MHM). Activities included research on the link between absenteeism and MHM, increasing girls' knowledge and skills on menstrual hygiene, distributing sanitary pads, and providing technical support for MHM initiatives in schools. MIET Africa played a significant role in these areas. The Department of Social Development contributed by donating toiletries and sanitary towels to underprivileged girls, as highlighted in focus group discussions.

According to the South Africa Undaunted Proposal, provided by UNICEF as part of this evaluation, the following actions were planned for as part of the programme implementation:

<u>Result Area 1: Increasing Awareness of HIV/AIDS</u>:

- Advocacy conducted with school communities on the provision of condoms and SRH-services at school
- Girls (and boys) use digital media to address HIV/AIDS amongst adolescents with specific reference to girls
- Young people take leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS in schools and communities

<u>Result Area 2: Providing Access to STEM for Girls</u>

- Girl learners from disadvantaged background are recruited, selected for job shadowing placement
- A programme of in-school coaching to girls in STEM subjects initiated
- Technogirl Alumni receive additional education support while at HEIs
- Technogirls actively engaged in the fight against HIV and AIDS besides academics
- Monitoring and evaluation of programme strengthened

<u>Result Area 3: Increasing Knowledge and Skills in Menstrual Health Management</u>

- Research absenteeism and menstrual hygiene management conducted
- Learners have increased knowledge and skills on MHM

[2] South Africa has 9 provinces. The project reached schools in all 9 provinces, and this evaluation has particular emphasis on 4 provinces.

[3] Non-fee paying schools in South Africa are public schools, primarily in the poorest communities (classified as Quintiles 1, 2, and 3), that do not charge compulsory school fees and are instead fully funded by the government to ensure access to education for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. In contrast, fee-paying schools (Quintiles 4 and 5) charge parents additional fees and typically serve more affluent communities, while independent schools set their own fees and operate privately. The focus on non-fee paying schools within the Undaunted Programme arose from the need to address historical inequalities and financial barriers that have long excluded poor learners from quality education, making these schools central to South African Government's efforts to promote improved educational outcomes.

Across all result areas, the Department of Basic Education was a key authority for the programme implementation, and provided policy support and institutional integration, while UNICEF facilitated coordination, monitoring, and technical assistance. Below is an overview of the different partners and which result areas they contributed to:

Table 1: Overview of implementing partners engaged in the programme*

Implementing partner	Result area	Year**
MIET Africa	1 and 3	2019-2023, with extension to 2024
Afrika Tikkun	2	2021-2022
Techno Girl Trust	2	2019-2021
Agape	1	2023
GFPA Foundation	2	2023
2Enable Foundation	2	2023-2024

**Five largest implementing partners by grant size (financial data) + Africa Tikkun*
***Year based on transfer of grant (financial data)*

Other stakeholders included provincial education and health departments, as well as civil society organizations, private sector partners, local communities, and school governing bodies. These actors were engaged by the implementing partners in the implementation of activities. UNICEF's specific contributions include technical expertise, funding to the implementing partners, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation. The roles of various stakeholders are further shown in table 3.

Overall, the programme aligned with UNICEF's child-friendly school model, known in South Africa as Care and Support for Teaching and Learning. The model is a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-sectoral response to addressing barriers to learning and development to transform schools into inclusive centres of learning, care, and support to ensure that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, access quality education and perform to the best of their abilities. This approach recognizes that schools can offer a solution given the right mix of curricular and co-curricular activities, provision of relevant services, and empowerment of girls. By providing a quality, protective, and supportive school experience, the program sought to make a difference in the lives of young South African girls.

The Undaunted Programme is closely aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their associated targets, and global indicators, reflecting its integrated approach to advancing gender equality, education, health, and inclusion in South Africa. Specifically, the programme directly contributes to SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being, particularly Target 3.3 (end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases; Indicator 3.3.1: HIV incidence per 1,000 uninfected population) and Target 3.7 (ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education; Indicator 3.7.1: proportion of women of reproductive age with their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods; Indicator 3.7.2: adolescent birth rate per 1,000 women aged 15–19). It also contributes to SDG 4 – Quality Education, especially Target 4.1 (ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education; Indicator 4.1.2: completion rate), Target 4.5 (eliminate gender disparities in education; Indicator 4.5.1: parity indices) and Target 4.3 (equal access to technical, vocational and tertiary education; Indicator 4.3.1: participation rate in formal and non-formal education).

The programme's focus on menstrual health management and comprehensive sexuality education advances SDG 5 – Gender Equality, notably Target 5.3 (eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage; Indicator 5.3.1: proportion of women married before age 18), Target 5.6 (ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; Indicator 5.6.1: proportion of women aged 15–49 making their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care), and Target 5.2 (eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls; Indicator 5.2.1: proportion subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence).

By targeting underprivileged girls, including those with disabilities and in rural areas, the programme also aligns with SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, particularly Target 10.2 (empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all; Indicator 10.2.1: proportion of people living below 50% of median income, by age, sex and disability) and Target 10.3 (ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome; Indicator 10.3.1: proportion of population reporting discrimination or harassment).

1.2 Context and Background

Across South Africa, there are pervasive issues in educational outcomes and attainment.[1] In 2023, 15% of learners do not complete Grade 9, with dropout rates increasing significantly in Grades 10 (10.6%) and 11 (13.4%). Only 40% of learners complete their final year of schooling, leaving 60% with no qualification beyond Grade 9. Reading competencies are alarmingly low, with up to 58% of primary school children unable to read with meaning, significantly impacting learning outcomes.[2][3]

Educational challenges in South Africa are deeply intertwined with socio-economic disparities that disproportionately affect learners from marginalised communities. Many students face inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to learning materials, which hinder their academic progress. Rural areas and informal settlements often lack basic educational resources, exacerbating the gap between urban and rural learners.[4]

In South Africa, physical and psychological safety concerns intersect with gender to shape students' educational experiences, particularly for girls. Many female learners face challenges such as inadequate sanitation facilities, including a lack of private and safe toilets and access to menstrual hygiene products, which can result in absenteeism and hinder their participation in class. Girls from low-income households are especially vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurity, both of which are linked to poor cognitive development and irregular school attendance. These gendered barriers are compounded by societal expectations and domestic responsibilities that disproportionately fall on girls, further limiting their educational opportunities and long-term prospects.[5] [6]

Though South Africa has made progress in advancing gender equality in recent decades, significant disparities and challenges remain. achieving gender parity in school attendance rates for 14–18-year-olds at 91%, there are persistent issues with educational completion and quality[7]. The gender-based challenges in South African education are compounded by societal norms and systemic inequalities. Girls and young women often face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence, which not only threatens their safety but also leads to increased absenteeism and dropout rates.

Health issues, particularly the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among adolescent girls, exacerbate these challenges. The intersection of health vulnerabilities and educational barriers creates a cycle of disadvantage that is difficult to break. In 2023, adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 were reportedly disproportionately affected by HIV, with prevalence rates significantly higher than their male counterparts. Specifically, young women in this age group had an HIV prevalence of 6.9%, compared to 3.5% among young men.[8]

Early pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities further limit educational attainment for many young females. Approximately 20.5% of 15–19-year-olds report having been pregnant. This twin scourge of high HIV infections and pregnancy rates imperils the future of young South African girls' education and traps them in an intergenerational cycle of poverty.[9]

Menstrual health and management present significant barriers to school attendance for many girls in South Africa. Studies indicate that up to 7 million girls may miss as much as 25% of their school year due to challenges related to menstruation[10], including lack of access to sanitary products, inadequate sanitation facilities, and insufficient menstrual health education. One in seven female learners reports not having enough sanitary products for every period, and this lack of access is associated with higher rates of school absenteeism.[11] Girls often resort to using unsafe alternatives such as rags or newspaper, increasing their risk of infection and embarrassment, which further discourages attendance. Cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation also prevent open discussion and support, exacerbating the problem.

Gender disparities are particularly evident in STEM subjects. Although males are in the minority within the secondary schooling system, they account for more than half of passes in mathematics and physical science, indicating a significant disadvantage for girls in breaking through the 'glass ceiling'.[12]

These challenges are set against a backdrop of pervasive inequality, which takes a particularly gendered angle. Women and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, including rural areas, poor neighbourhoods, townships, and farm communities, are most affected. Other barriers to teaching and learning include physical and psychological safety concerns, sexual and gender-based violence, alcohol and drug use, and nutrition issues.

The programme was implemented within a robust policy and legal framework aimed at addressing these challenges. At the national level, the South African Constitution and the South African Schools Act guarantee the right to education and non-discrimination, mandating equal access to schooling for all learners, including girls and pregnant students. Key policies such as the National Development Plan 2030, the Policy on Learner Pregnancy, the Integrated School Health Policy, and the National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, and STIs (2017–2022) further entrench gender equality, educational retention, and the reduction of dropout rates as central national priorities. These frameworks emphasize support for sexual and reproductive health and rights, menstrual hygiene management, and participation in STEM fields for girls. Political factors also played a role in the programme implementation, with ongoing government efforts to identify barriers to girls' educational achievement and to maintain inclusive schooling despite socio-economic challenges.

The programme aligned with international commitments, such as the SDGs, as briefly discussed above. The programme's emphasis on HIV/AIDS awareness, menstrual health management, and the empowerment of girls through STEM also align with treaty obligations, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

1.3 Evaluation Purpose, Objective and Scope

This evaluation marks the conclusion of the five-year Undaunted Programme[4], providing an assessment of the programme, in accordance with the ToRs and the inception report (please see Appendix 1 and 2). The report systematically examines the degree of alignment between planned outputs, results, and outcomes, and actual achievements, using a reconstructed Theory of Change as a basis on which to build the evaluation matrix. The evaluation seeks to generate insights that will guide the design of future initiatives with similar objectives and inform the long-term sustainability of such interventions.

Specifically, this evaluation:

1. Assesses if the implementation of the programme was in line with the set outputs, results and outcomes;
2. Analyses the factors that may have influenced the implementation of the programme;
3. Collects data on outcomes; and
4. Documents lessons learned on the implementation of the programme that can support planning for similar types of interventions.

The evaluation design for the Undaunted Programme was developed collaboratively with UNICEF and formally agreed upon prior to the commencement of evaluation activities, as detailed in Appendix 1 and 3 and in alignment with the ToR (available in Appendix 2). Within the inception report (Appendix 1), the evaluation framework, objectives, and methodologies were aligned with stakeholder expectations before implementation began.

At the outset of the evaluation, the Undaunted Programme did not have an explicit, overarching theory of change (ToC) to guide its implementation and assessment. To address this gap, the evaluation team, in collaboration with the evaluation's steering committee, undertook a process to reconstruct a ToC that articulated the programme's key components, intended outcomes, and underlying assumptions. This reconstructed ToC served as the conceptual foundation for the evaluation, informing the development of the evaluation matrix—a tool that systematically aligns evaluation questions with relevant indicators, data sources, and methods. The evaluation matrix, which was reviewed and approved by UNICEF, is the primary reference point for the evaluation process, shaping both data collection and analysis. As a result, the evaluation refers back to the evaluation matrix when assessing programme performance, rather than to the reconstructed ToC itself.

The Undaunted – Breaking the Glass Ceiling Programme was designed on the premise that if targeted, multi-sectoral activities are delivered in schools and communities, they will generate mutually reinforcing changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and enabling environments that cumulatively reduce key barriers to girls' education and empowerment. Through teacher training, curriculum integration, and provision of comprehensive sexuality education, HIV/AIDS awareness, and menstrual health management support (including sanitary products and improved WASH facilities), girls would gain knowledge, confidence, and the means to manage their health, reducing absenteeism, early school leaving, and vulnerability to early pregnancy and HIV. In parallel, STEM coaching, digital literacy, job-shadowing, and mentorship were intended to expand girls' aspirations, skills, and access to role models in non-traditional careers. Youth-led clubs, leadership training, and community advocacy were designed to shift peer and community norms toward gender equality and acceptance of girls' education, while partnerships with government and the private sector would secure resources and policy support. Together, these outputs would lead to immediate outcomes such as safer sexual behaviours, improved attendance, increased self-efficacy, greater female participation in STEM, and stronger peer and school support systems.

[4] The evaluation scope covers the entire five-year project period from 2018-2023.

Over time, these intermediate outcomes were expected to consolidate into more gender-sensitive and supportive school and community environments, widening opportunities for girls to remain in school, achieve academically, and transition into further study or decent work. This causal chain rests on several core assumptions: that school and community environments remain safe and free from significant disruption; that stakeholders (teachers, parents, peers, and officials) are willing to challenge negative social norms; that government maintains policy and resource commitments to gender-responsive education, health, and STEM inclusion; that enabling infrastructure (including WASH and digital access) is functional; and that structural barriers such as poverty, restrictive gender norms, disability discrimination, and digital exclusion can be mitigated sufficiently to allow girls to participate and benefit. It is further assumed that partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, and local government remain active to sustain momentum, and that political or policy shifts do not undermine institutional support. If these conditions hold, the cumulative effect of the programme's interventions will be that adolescent girls are better able to complete their education, protect themselves from violence, avoid early pregnancy and HIV infection, and thrive as empowered young women. The evaluation of the Undaunted programme was designed to be used directly by key decision-makers and implementers, ensuring that its findings inform critical choices about the future direction, adaptation, and potential scaling of the intervention. Its primary intended users are UNICEF South Africa, the South African government—particularly the Department of Education—the schools who participated in the programme, and the Canadian Natcom as they key donor of this programme. These stakeholders are positioned to act on the evaluation's recommendations, shaping policy, resource allocation, and the design of future initiatives. The evaluation is also expected to serve broader accountability and learning purposes, providing robust evidence on what worked, what did not, and why, so that lessons can be integrated into ongoing and future programming.

The scope of the evaluation covers programme implementation, outcomes, and lessons learned. Chronologically, it focuses on the period from February 2018 to December 2023. Geographically, it encompasses KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Gauteng, where the programme was most intensively implemented, as was agreed in the inception phase. At the outset of the evaluation, 4 main implementing partners were to be included in the scope. However, only 3 out of the 4 implementing partners agreed to take part in the evaluation. As such, only beneficiaries and partners associated with activities implemented by MIET, Agape and Afrika Tikkun are included in this evaluation. These partners were engaged as informants of the evaluation (see appendix for the list of interviewees) and provided support for the implementation of data collection with beneficiaries.

As per the inception report, the evaluation does not cover interventions outside the specified timeframe, geographic locations, or those not included in the Undaunted Programme. The reader is requested to refer to the inception report (Appendix 1) for more details on the scope, purpose and objective.

Although the inception report included an evaluability assessment and outlined anticipated data and methodological gaps, it became evident during the main evaluation phase that the gaps in available data, documentation, and baseline information were larger than originally expected. While the evaluation team took steps up front to address known limitations, such as triangulating data sources, the practical challenges encountered—particularly related to missing baseline data, incomplete monitoring records, and limited access to some beneficiary groups—were more substantial than foreseen. This reality affected both the breadth and depth of the analysis, and the reader of this evaluation should make note that the actual data and evidence gaps exceeded those accounted for in the inception phase. The evaluation therefore seeks to carefully qualify the findings reflected in the report, both overall in Chapter 2.0 – Methodology, and in the presentation of the evaluation findings. More detail on limitations and challenges is available in section 2.4.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Evaluation design and questions

To achieve the specific aims of this evaluation, a mixed methods approach using a concurrent design to build the evidence base was selected. The evaluation was designed to be summative in nature and data collection tools were used to probe and assess programmatic achievements from the period of 2018-2023.

The evaluation questions were developed to align with the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, ensuring a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the Undaunted programme across the key dimensions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation was designed with reference to UNICEF's internal standards, including the convention of the rights of the child.

The evaluation questions and sub-questions were initially identified in the Terms of Reference provided by UNICEF and were further refined during the inception phase, when an evaluability assessment was conducted. This assessment focused on systematically reviewing the evaluation matrix against the availability and quality of data required to answer each evaluation question. As a result of this assessment, the evaluation matrix was revised to ensure that all retained questions could be answered with the available evidence. Questions that could not be robustly addressed due to data constraints were either modified or removed, and indicators were adjusted to reflect what could be measured reliably. This iterative process ensured that the evaluation remained focused, feasible, and credible, and that the final set of questions aligned with both the objectives of the evaluation and the realities of the programme's monitoring and reporting systems. The evaluation matrix is available in Appendix 1. Please refer to section 2.4 for a presentation of how data gaps beyond those identified in the feasibility assessment impacted the breadth and depth of the analysis. The final evaluation questions were approved by UNICEF and the steering committee as part of the inception phase.

In this evaluation, findings are frequently organised by implementing partner, reflecting the way the Undaunted Programme was structured—with different partners responsible for distinct result areas. However, it is important to emphasise that the evaluation itself is summative and focused on assessing the overall performance, achievements, and lessons of the programme as a whole, rather than evaluating or comparing the individual partners. Where a partner-based narrative is present, it is used solely for analytical clarity and to accurately capture the contributions and activities within each result area.

The evaluation was designed as a primarily analytical in nature and summative assessment aimed at examining the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the Undaunted Programme, in line with OECD-DAC criteria. It was not intended to establish causal attribution of observed changes to the programme's interventions. As is explained in the proceeding sections, the concurrent mixed-methods design, reliance on convenience sampling, absence of baseline data, and gaps in routine monitoring meant that experimental or quasi-experimental approaches capable of demonstrating attribution with statistical confidence were neither feasible nor within the scope agreed at inception. This is also documented in appendix 1 and 3. Instead, the evaluation applies contribution analysis principles — triangulating qualitative and quantitative evidence to identify plausible links between programme activities and reported outcomes while acknowledging the influence of external factors. All findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of potential programme contribution rather than definitive proof of causality.

2.2 Methodology for data collection and analysis

The evaluation matrix in Appendix 1 provides an overview of the use of data collection instruments and analysis methods for each evaluation question. The overall methodology for data collection and analysis is described in sections below.

2.2.1 Data collection tools

The evaluation selected and employed data collection tools designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative evidence in alignment with the evaluation's objectives. All data collection tools are available in the research protocol available in Appendix 3.

The primary data collection instruments included:

- **Document Review:** Systematic mapping and synthesis of programme documentation, including concept notes, donor and progress reports, and other relevant records. This provided foundational context, identified programming gaps, and informed the development of qualitative tools. The document review covered primary programme documents, including the original programme concept note, the approved inception report, all accessible implementing partner quarterly reports (2019–2023), donor annual narrative and financial reports, relevant DBE policy documents (Life Orientation Curriculum, CSTL standards, Integrated School Health Policy), training guides, and prior evaluative studies on MHM and STEM in South Africa. In addition, the evaluation incorporated monitoring and administrative records, notably implementing partners' quarterly reports, school-level activity registers, and similar programme information. These were used to review reported reach figures and costs against activities, cross-reference timelines and activity types against interview/FGD accounts, identify gaps or inconsistencies in reporting, and contextualise survey and qualitative findings within existing institutional data. A complete list of reviewed background is provided in Appendix 7.
- **Key Informant Interviews** were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including donors, implementing partners, government officials, school administrators, and field staff. These interviews followed detailed guides tailored to each group, covering topics such as programme relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The guides allowed for probing and adaptation based on respondent expertise and experience. Appendix 6 provides an overview of key informants. In total, 10 KIIs were conducted with the following stakeholder categories:
    - 3 UNICEF staff
    - 2 DBE official
    - 3 implementing partner staff (covering MIET, Agape, Afrika Tikkun)
    - 2 school principals.
- **Focus Group Discussions** were facilitated with programme beneficiaries (primarily adolescent girls but also including parents and community members) using structured guides to explore collective experiences, perceived programme impact, challenges, and recommendations. Six FGDs were held with a total of 20 participants, comprised of four groups of adolescent girl direct beneficiaries (rural = 3 FGDs; urban = 1), one group of parents/community members, and one mixed group including teachers and learner support agents. Locations spanned Gauteng (2 FGDs), KwaZulu-Natal (2), Eastern Cape (1), and Limpopo (1). Within FGDs, participants' gender, age range, and role in the programme were recorded to support analysis and contextualisation of responses.
- **Surveys** were administered with programme beneficiaries to quantitatively document core indicators related to programmatic relevance, perceived effectiveness, and satisfaction. The survey instrument included questions on demographics, participation in programme activities, and self-assessment of outcomes across the three result areas (HIV/AIDS awareness, STEM access, and menstrual health management).

Each tool was developed or adapted during the inception phase, piloted for contextual relevance, and refined based on feedback and pre-testing. The evaluation matrix directly linked each evaluation question to specific data collection tools, ensuring systematic coverage and triangulation of findings. In addition, tools incorporated considerations for disability, gender, and equity, and were accompanied by robust informed consent and confidentiality protocols, especially for interviews and FGDs involving minors or vulnerable groups.

2.2.2 Stakeholders

The key stakeholders for this evaluation were defined during the inception phase and are presented in the below table.

Table 2: Overview of stakeholders

Stakeholder	Role in the evaluation	Assumed interest in the evaluation
UNICEF South Africa and Evaluation Reference group	Programme implementer and evaluation commissioner. Assisting with participant recruitment, coordination with key stakeholders/implementing partners and beneficiaries, and facilitating data collection	Assessing programme effectiveness, learning lessons for future programming. Key role in ensuring smooth evaluation process and accurate representation of programme implementation
Programme beneficiaries and local communities	Beneficiaries of programme. Feedback key in the evaluation key to accountability to affected populations. Primary participants in focus group discussions and surveys	Providing feedback on programme effectiveness and relevance to their needs, especially young women, those with disabilities, and those in urban/rural areas
Implementing partners (MIET, Girls Fly Africa, Africa Tikkun, Agape, DBE)	Key informants for interviews, responsible for programme execution	Assessing their performance, identifying challenges and successes in implementation
Government counterparts/line ministries (DBE)	Informants of evaluation and key for understanding government policy vis-à-vis programme	Evaluating programme alignment with government priorities and initiatives
School administrators	Key informants	Assessing programme impact on students and schools
Donor (Canadian National Committee of UNICEF)	Consumers of the evaluation findings	Evaluating cost-effectiveness of funded interventions

The table demonstrates that i) school administrators, ii) government counterparts, and iii) implementing partners were identified as stakeholders to be included in possible key informant interviews, and that iv) programme beneficiaries and local communities were to be included in focus group discussions and surveys.

Figure 1: Schematic showing the roles of the stakeholders within the programme

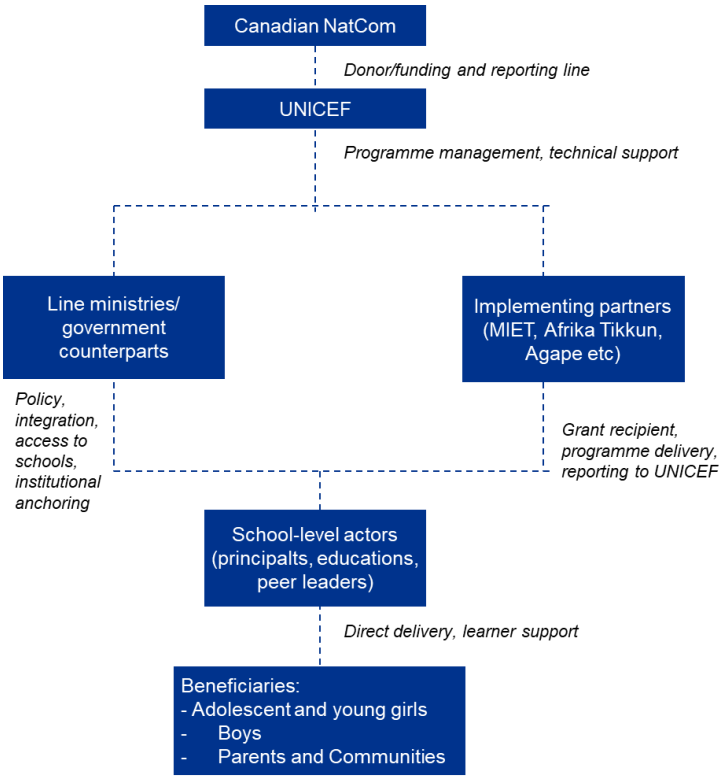

Figure 1 shows how the Undaunted Programme was implemented through a multi-layered structure that combined donor funding, UNICEF coordination, government ownership, partner delivery, and school-level engagement. The schematic illustrates the key stakeholders, how they interacted, and where accountability lines sat throughout the programme cycle.

At the top of the structure, the Canadian National Committee for UNICEF acted as the donor, providing financial resources to UNICEF South Africa. UNICEF was directly accountable to the donor for the use of funds and the achievement of agreed results, producing consolidated programme and financial reports and providing periodic strategic updates. UNICEF South Africa sat at the centre of the delivery system as the convenor, grant manager, and technical lead. Its responsibilities included programme design oversight, alignment with national policies, quality assurance, and the disbursement of grants or programme cooperation agreements to implementing partners. UNICEF was also accountable for donor reporting.

In a formal partnership with government, the Department of Basic Education was the key policy counterpart, providing access to schools, embedding content in the Life Orientation curriculum, and aligning interventions with frameworks. Other ministries – including the Department of Health and Department of Social Development are also key partners of UNICEF. Government ministries were accountable within their own political and administrative systems, but had a collaborative, non-contractual link to UNICEF and implementing partners, ensuring policy coherence and institutional anchoring.

Implementing partners were contracted by UNICEF to deliver specific components in their areas of expertise. They received technical guidance and funding from UNICEF and were contractually accountable to UNICEF for financial probity, activity delivery, and reporting on agreed indicators. IPs also maintained strong coordination with provincial and district DBE offices to secure school access and timetabling.

At the operational frontline, school-level played a dual role as delivery agents and local champions. They integrated programme activities into timetables, facilitated GBEM and other peer-led clubs, and ensured follow-up support to learners. Schools were accountable upward to DBE structures for broader institutional performance and to IPs/UNICEF for the agreed programme commitments.

2.2.3 Sampling

The research protocol for the evaluation (Appendix 1 and 3) included an approximate sample size of n~10-20 for the key informant interviews, and approximately 4-12 focus group discussions (n~24-96). However, the qualitative weighting of the evaluation meant that the team would discontinue data collection when saturation of data had been reached. Stakeholders reached during the data collection were 10 stakeholders in key informant interviews, and 20 stakeholders in 6 focus group discussions. Recruitment challenges meant fewer than 6 participants attended each FGD. However, after 6 FGDs it was clear that similar themes were recurring in discussions and saturation was reached.

The survey, originally intended to consist of a representative sample of programme beneficiaries, was deemed not feasible during the inception phase. This in part due to the complex nature and timing of this evaluation (e.g., occurring several years after programme completion), which meant there were limitations in accessing former beneficiaries according to the sampling methodology outlined in the inception report (the reader is requested to review the inception report in the annex for more details on this). As a result, KPMG adjusted the methodology after the inception phase, in agreement with UNICEF, to emphasize qualitative approaches, adopting a primarily convenience sampling strategy. This was reviewed and approved by the ethical review board (see section 2.3).

KPMG leveraged information from the programme's implementing partners to identify the original beneficiary locations and numbers, and further where beneficiaries were most likely to be found, acknowledging that many would likely have already left the schools where the programmes were initially implemented. Therefore, the sampling approach was modified to enhance our ability to answer the evaluation questions effectively. Additionally, we worked with facilitators who were involved in the programme to support access to schools/centres and beneficiaries.

The sampling method for each partner was tailored to their specific programme structure and beneficiary population, optimizing the quality of data collected to allow for in-depth exploration of evaluation questions (e.g. to help develop breadth and depth of understanding of programmatic achievements). Furthermore, given the nature of the evaluation and the limited availability of past participants, achieving representativeness was neither a primary focus nor feasible. Instead, participants were selected to provide rich, in-depth qualitative insights into programmatic achievements and challenges.

The table below provides an overview of the total beneficiary population per implementing partner and the multi-tiered sampling strategy that was employed.

Table 3: Sampling strategy of direct beneficiaries - overview of plan

Result Area	Implementing Partner	Total Beneficiaries	Sample Size	Multi-tiered sampling strategy	
				Tier 1	Tier
1 and 3	MIET	384	384	Convenience	Convenience Stratified random sampling by province
1	Agape/DBE	105	105	NA	Sampling of all online participants who completed the programme (i.e. Census)
2	Afrika Tikkun	10,916	574	Convenience	Predetermined selection criteria to determine a proportional sample that maintains in-school (87%) /out-of-school (13%) ratio
Total		**11,405**	**1063**		

In designing the sample for each data collection stream, the evaluation team intentionally sought to capture perspectives from a diverse mix of stakeholder types, geographic locations, and demographic groups. The 10 KIIs covered key institutional levels involved in the Undaunted Programme, including UNICEF South Africa staff, national- and provincial-level Department of Basic Education (DBE) officials, senior staff from all three participating implementing partners (MIET Africa, Agape/DBE, and Afrika Tikkun), and school-based personnel such as principals and administrative leads. These interviews were conducted across four provinces (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo) to ensure representation of both high-reach and more remote implementation contexts.

The 6 FGDs were purposively selected to balance rural and urban school settings and to reflect different participant roles and characteristics. Four groups consisted of adolescent girl direct beneficiaries (three rural, one urban) and were complemented by one group of parents/community members and one mixed group of male and female teachers and learner support assistants. This combination allowed exploration of both female and male perspectives, as well as triangulation between learner, educator, and community viewpoints.

The survey reached 775 respondents across the three implementing partners. Respondents were aged 12–24, with a majority between 15 and 19 years; 71 % identified as female and 29 % as male; and approximately 2 % (n = 15) self-identified as having a disability. Provincial coverage reflected the main implementation areas, and the sample included both in-school and out-of-school youth. Demographics were tracked to allow disaggregation by age, gender, disability status, and urban/rural location in the analysis.

KPMG notes that there are limitations to this sampling approach. These are detailed below in section 2.4 Limitations and Challenges. The full sample of participants was not reached during the data collection phase, despite consistent efforts, given the challenges described in this section. The survey was responded to by 775 programme beneficiaries. The respondents of the survey were N=98 for Agape, N=326 for Afrika Tikkun, and N=351 for MIET. The evaluation was unable to include former beneficiaries from early years in some target provinces due to incomplete contact information and school transfers. Voices of non-participants or beneficiaries who dropped out mid-programme were also limited, constraining insights into barriers from those disengaged early. The perspectives of parents and community leaders were captured in only one FGD, meaning these views are less prominent in the evidence base compared to learners, educators, and implementing partners. These gaps are acknowledged in interpreting the findings.

Full details of primary data collection — including field locations, the number and type of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), disaggregated by stakeholder category and province — are provided in Annex 6. In summary, a total of 10 KIIs were conducted: 3 with UNICEF staff, 2 with Department of Basic Education (DBE) officials, 3 with implementing partner staff, and 2 with school principals. Six FGDs were convened, with 20 participants in total, comprising four adolescent girls' beneficiary groups (three rural, one urban), one parent/community group, and one mixed teacher/learner support assistant group, across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo. The beneficiary survey yielded 775 responses: Agape/DBE = 98, Afrika Tikkun = 326, and MIET = 351. Respondents were aged 12–24, with the majority between 15–19 years; 71 % identified as female and 29 % as male. Around 2 % (n = 15) self-identified as having a disability. Urban/rural splits and implementing-partner affiliation are reported in the relevant findings sections. These characteristics are summarised in Annex 6, and referenced here to support transparency for the reader.

2.2.4 Training of data collectors

A total of 10 female research assistants were selected to work on this project. The research assistants were selected based on their experience in managing mixed-methods data collection among adolescents and youth. To empower the youth, we selected beneficiaries from Afrika Tikkun to assist with telephonic interviews. The table below shows the distribution of the research assistants.

Table 4:Training of data collectors per site

Site	Implementation Partner	No. of Research Assistants	Gender
Gauteng	Agape/DBE	2	Female
Gauteng	Afrika Tikkun	3	Female
Gauteng	MIET	2	Female
Eastern Cape	MIET	1	Female
Kwa-Zulu Natal	MIET	1	Female
Limpopo	Afrika Tikkun	1	Female

A virtual training was conducted with research assistants from Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal, while physical face-to-face training was conducted with the Gauteng and Limpopo teams. A 1-day training session covered a broad range of issues, including (but not limited to):

- Ensuring a common understanding of the study's goals, objectives, capturing tools and procedures

- Ensuring that all research assistants know precisely how to navigate their way around the data collection tool and use the same response procedures for each variable.
- Ethical considerations on how to handle confidential information during and after data collection
- Recording responses, storing and transmitting data following correct procedures and processes

Research assistants participated in a telephonic pilot study as part of their training among the actual beneficiaries. The pilot data was not included as part of the actual real data presented in this report. Each research assistant was given an opportunity to interview two beneficiaries, after which a feedback session was held to discuss any challenges/difficulties experienced.

2.2.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using qualitative content analysis. This process included three main stages: preparation, organisation, and reporting. The KPMG team synthesised the data to describe key findings, ensuring that the analysis captured stakeholders' direct insights without imposing preconceived ideas or biases. This thematic analysis enabled the identification of core themes, barriers, enablers, and lessons learned across the programme's result areas. For the qualitative component, the evaluation team did not develop or apply a formal, pre-defined codebook. Given the evaluation's primarily analytical aims, the relatively small number of KIIs and FGDs, and the tight timelines for post-fieldwork analysis, a flexible thematic analysis approach was adopted. This allowed the team to identify and refine categories inductively from the data while still using the OECD-DAC criteria and evaluation matrix as overarching guides. This approach was considered more suitable for capturing unanticipated themes and ensuring responsiveness to the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, rather than constraining analysis within a rigid coding framework.

Quantitative data, primarily from beneficiaries, was analysed using descriptive statistics. This included summarizing survey responses to provide an overview of key indicators, trends, and patterns related to programme reach, effectiveness, and beneficiary satisfaction. The integration of descriptive statistics complemented the qualitative findings, allowing for the triangulation of evidence and a more nuanced interpretation of results. Quantitative survey data were cleaned and analysed in Microsoft Excel. This decision reflected both the descriptive nature of the survey and the sampling constraints. Excel was adequate for the intended outputs — namely, basic tabulations, disaggregation by selected variables, and production of charts for inclusion in the report.

The survey results were analysed and are presented in the evaluation report per Results Area and/or implementing partner and disaggregated per gender and disability status as pertinent. During the analysis phase of the evaluation, it became evident that survey respondents' key takeaways from the Undaunted Programme varied greatly in terms of the themes that were raised. These differences were primarily due to the specific interventions they received, which varied greatly among the three implementing partners who are in scope of this evaluation. The evaluation team has therefore found it necessary to analyse and present results disaggregated per implementing partner, depending on the evaluation question at hand. This distinction allows for more meaningful insights into what the programme achieved across the results areas.

Throughout the analysis, the evaluation matrix remained a dynamic tool, guiding the identification of discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes and supporting the systematic examination of the programme's achievements and challenges.

Triangulation of data was conducted both within-data-type, by comparing findings across stakeholder categories and geographic contexts), and across-data-types, by mapping qualitative themes against survey statistics and document review evidence using the evaluation matrix. Where contradictions arose, the team re-examined original transcripts, revisited input with implementing partners and UNICEF, and cross-checked with records provided by implementing partners.

2.3 Ethical Approval Process

As part of this evaluation, ethical approval was sought from the DUT and was approved on 5th March 2025. The ethical approval and documentation is available in the Appendix 4 and 5[5].

[5] The Appendices include draft information sheets, consent and assent forms for participation in the evaluation. The completed forms are not attached to this report, to maintain anonymity of respondents.

Throughout the evaluation, the evaluation team was guided by the approved research protocol from DUT, and explicit and contextualized obligations in accordance with UNEG ethical standards. These obligations included maintaining independence, impartiality, credibility, and accountability, while actively managing any potential conflicts of interest. Independence required that evaluators were able to exercise free and unbiased judgement, free from undue influence by any stakeholder or external party. Impartiality was upheld by ensuring that all findings and recommendations were based on a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the programme's strengths and weaknesses, without distortion by personal views or interests. Credibility was ensured by using reliable data and transparent, methodologically sound approaches, with findings and conclusions grounded in robust evidence. Conflicts of interest were proactively disclosed and managed, with evaluators required to step aside from any situation where their objectivity could be compromised. Accountability was demonstrated through transparency in all decision-making, responsiveness to stakeholder concerns, and the fair and accurate reporting of findings to all affected parties.

Ethical safeguards for participants were central to the evaluation process. These included respect for dignity and diversity, recognizing the unique backgrounds, cultures, and circumstances of all individuals involved. The right to self-determination was upheld by ensuring participants' voluntary and informed consent, with special attention given to those with limited agency, such as children and vulnerable groups. Fair representation was achieved through inclusive sampling and engagement strategies, ensuring that the voices of women, girls, and marginalized communities were heard and reflected in the findings. The evaluation adhered to strict codes for vulnerable groups, including do-no-harm principles and protocols to protect participants from any risk of physical, psychological, or social harm. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained at all stages, with data collection, storage, and reporting procedures designed to protect participants' identities and personal information. In cases where children were interviewed, explicit reference was made to UNICEF's procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children, ensuring that all interactions were conducted in a safe, respectful, and age-appropriate manner, with appropriate consent processes and additional protective measures in place.

2.4 Limitations and Challenges

The evaluation encountered several limitations and barriers that affected both data collection and the overall robustness of the findings. Accessibility of beneficiaries posed a major challenge, particularly for participants from earlier phases of the programme, many of whom had since left primary school or changed locations. Gaps in contact information further complicated efforts to reach the intended survey sample, making it difficult to trace and engage intended respondents.

At the outset of the evaluation engagement, an evaluability assessment was conducted in collaboration with UNICEF to ensure that all evaluation questions could be realistically addressed with the available data and evidence. During this process, it was decided that some questions would not be included in the set of questions guiding this evaluation, due to limitations in the data that could be collected and analysed. For further details on the scope and rationale behind these decisions, the reader is requested to revisit the research protocol in appendix 3 of the evaluation report.

Sampling was necessarily purposive and convenience-based, following contact gaps and logistical constraints. As a result, the sample is not statistically representative nor generalizable, with gaps in the voices of non-participants, early leavers, and marginalized cohorts. The challenge of locating beneficiaries who moved away from their original schools further narrowed representativity.

Available documentation varied in completeness and quality by implementing partner and year, with reports often fragmented and lacking unified results frameworks or outcome-level indicators. This fragmentation hindered systematic aggregation of data and prevented the linking of costs to outputs or outcomes, leaving the evaluation heavily reliant on descriptive statistics, partner reports, and qualitative accounts. Incomplete or non-standardized reporting further limited the comprehensiveness of document review and triangulation of findings.

The evaluation did not systematically capture or analyse unintended outcomes, lacking dedicated research questions and tools for such effects; positive or negative unintended results are likely under-reported or missing. Further, financial data was incomplete and not sufficiently disaggregated by activity, output, or result area, precluding any rigorous assessment of cost-effectiveness or value-for-money and preventing comparison between resource use and achievements.

The limitations in availability of robust baseline measures and systematic, programme-wide monitoring frameworks from the outset necessitated the reconstruction of a Theory of Change post-hoc and repeated triangulation across disparate sources. No comprehensive baseline measures or monitoring systems were established, meaning progress over time and comparisons against intended targets or similar interventions were difficult or impossible. Attribution of observed changes directly to the programme was thus inherently limited, and findings at outcome and impact level should be considered indicative and illustrative rather than definitive proof of attribution.

The analytical, summative nature of the evaluation design and lack of experimental or quasi-experimental controls precluded establishing causal attribution for observed changes in knowledge, skills, or behaviours. External influences, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, socio-economic disruptions, and local policy shifts, likely impacted both delivery and outcomes, complicating interpretation of programme effects. Although efforts were made to triangulate data and apply a broad, multi-perspective lens, reliance on largely descriptive data without robust controls limits analytic confidence.

Selection bias arose from the difficulty accessing certain schools or remote communities, while respondent bias (including social desirability in interviews/surveys) and evaluator bias (interpretive preconceptions) remain recognized risks. Protocols to minimize these biases were limited, further constraining the strength of evidence. The convenience sampling approach and limited geographic spread mean findings may not easily apply to the broader population or other contexts—generalizability and external validity are thus narrow.

An important additional limitation arose from the fact that, although four implementing partners were originally intended to participate in the evaluation, only three ultimately agreed to be involved. The non-participation of one partner further restricted the diversity of perspectives captured and reduced the representativity of the sample, making it harder to reflect the full breadth of programme delivery and beneficiary experiences.

While these limitations inevitably constrained the breadth and rigour of the evidence, the evaluation team applied a range of strategies to reduce their impact on the credibility and balance of findings. To address the difficulty in tracing former beneficiaries and the non-participation of one implementing partner, we adapted the sampling approach in consultation with UNICEF, shifting to a purposive/convenience sample while working to ensure diversity across provinces, gender, age groups, and implementing partners still in scope. Where direct beneficiary contact was not possible, proxy perspectives were obtained through teachers, learner support agents, and community members. The absence of baseline and comprehensive monitoring data was partly mitigated by reconstructing the programme’s Theory of Change, developing a detailed evaluability assessment during the inception phase, an evaluation matrix, and triangulating multiple data sources for each evaluation question.

The reader should note that the figures and results presented from the survey are based on limited sample sizes and a non-representative sample and should thus be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive regarding the programme's overall relevance. Findings related to the experiences of disabled beneficiaries offer valuable insights but reflect only the perspectives of those who participated and should not be considered representative of all disabled beneficiaries. While the evaluation provides valuable qualitative insights on relevance, implementation experiences, and perceived outcomes of the Undaunted Programme, its findings must be treated as preliminary and non-generalizable due to the persistent constraints outlined above.

3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following sections present the evaluation's findings. Findings were derived from key informant interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders, a survey with beneficiary, and a desk review, and follows the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Readers are encouraged to review appendix 7 for more information on the evaluation questions, as well as section 2.4 for limitations of this study.

3.1 Relevance: Is the programme doing the right thing?

The following section presents the findings to three evaluation questions for relevance:

1. To what extent does the programme respond to priority issues specified by the South African government?

2. How was the project across the three action areas (and the ToC) relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries, especially young women, those with disabilities, and in urban/rural areas?

3. Are the objectives of the project still valid?

Key findings include:

- The programme closely aligned with national priorities on education, health, and gender equality, particularly for young women.
- The interventions were mostly contextually relevant, according to self-reported perceptions of target beneficiaries.
- The programme objectives remain relevant, reflecting ongoing priorities in HIV prevention, menstrual hygiene, STEM education, and inclusion.

Evidence

Findings were supported by desk reviews, policy analysis, participant surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups. Validity is strengthened by data triangulation across sources, but rural samples remain limited. The reader is requested to review section 2.4 for limitations in the evidence.

3.1.1 The Undaunted programme addressed priority issues affecting girls, as identified by the South African government, UNICEF and UN-partners

The Undaunted Programme aligns with broader national and international commitments, such as the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality[13], the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women[14], and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa[15]. These frameworks emphasize not only educational equality but also the importance of women's participation in economic activities, including STEM fields. Additionally, the programme's objectives and operational modalities are consistent with UNICEF South Africa's Country Programme 2020–2025. By embedding its interventions within existing education and health systems, and by focusing on the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, the programme is positioned as a relevant and contextually grounded response to stated priorities of the UN in-country.

The Undaunted Programme demonstrates alignment with the priority issues specified by the South African government. The programme's design and implementation were informed by a comprehensive understanding of the persistent challenges facing girls and young women in South Africa, including gender inequality, low educational attainment, adolescent pregnancy, HIV prevalence, and barriers to participation in STEM fields, as is outlined in chapter 1 of this evaluation.

At the policy level, the South African Constitution[16] and the South African Schools Act[17] enshrine the right to education and non-discrimination, mandating that all learners, including girls and pregnant students, have equal access to schooling. The Policy on Learner Pregnancy[18] further reinforces this by seeking to prevent discrimination against pregnant learners and ensure their continued education, directly addressing one of the key drivers of female dropout rates. The National Development Plan 2030 sets explicit objectives to eliminate discrimination against girls in education and reduce dropout rates[19], while the Department of Basic Education's Gender Equity Unit promotes girls' retention and participation in science and mathematics.[20] Policies such as the Integrated School Health Policy[21], the National Policy on HIV, STIs and TB[22], and the Sanitary Dignity Policy Framework[23] address sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, and the provision of sanitary products, which are factors that impact girls' attendance and performance in school. The programme was also aligned with the National Skills Development Plan 2030.[24]

The Undaunted Programme was designed in collaboration with the Department of Education and other government stakeholders, ensuring that the interventions respond directly to these national priorities. It was observed by informants of this evaluation that the government over time has worked to identify why children drop out of school, operating on the hypothesis that certain events or barriers make it difficult for girls to stay in school. The programme's integration into the Life Orientation curriculum, its focus on non-fee-paying schools in priority provinces, and its emphasis on comprehensive sexuality education, menstrual health management, and STEM job-shadowing are all closely aligned with government strategies to keep girls in school, promote gender equality, improve educational outcomes, and enhance adolescent health.

3.1.2 The objectives of the programme remain valid and relevant in the current South African context

The objectives of the programme remain valid and relevant in the current South African context. Challenges such as gender inequality, low educational attainment, high rates of adolescent pregnancy, HIV prevalence, and barriers to participation in STEM fields, as described in the introductory paragraphs to this evaluation, continue to affect adolescent girls and young women. The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, with informants of this evaluation noting that there was a perceived increase in teenage pregnancies during the lockdowns, as well as limited access to online schooling for many young girls.[25]

This programme's result area 1 responds to the government's continued recognition of persistently high HIV prevalence among adolescent girls and young women[26]. The government's commitment to expanding HIV treatment and prevention, including the 2025 initiative to place an additional 1.1 million people on treatment, is mirrored in the Programme's focus on school-based HIV/AIDS education and awareness. By integrating HIV prevention into the Life Orientation curriculum and supporting access to sexual and reproductive health services in schools, the Programme operationalizes the government's 2024 Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Intervention Plan[27], which emphasizes advocacy and targeted interventions for youth.

The Programme's emphasis on providing underprivileged girls with job-shadowing, mentorship, and in-school support in STEM fields is directly aligned with the government's policy focus on increasing women's and girls' participation in STEM[28]. Initiatives such as the commitments under the Government's G20 presidency agenda[29] reinforce the national imperative to address gender disparities in STEM achievement and economic participation. The Undaunted Programme's STEM activities support these goals by targeting barriers to girls' advancement in STEM and providing practical pathways for engagement and achievement.

The integration of MHM into the Life Orientation curriculum and the development of accessible educational materials address a specific government-identified barrier to girls' education: absenteeism due to inadequate menstrual hygiene support. This aligns with the government's broader agenda to improve educational retention and quality for girls, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas[30]. The Programme's approach—targeting girls in grades 4–7 and ensuring inclusivity for learners with disabilities—supports the government's commitment to equity in education and the removal of practical barriers to girls' participation and achievement.

3.1.3 Programme interventions were contextually relevant, but barriers remain

Result area 1 and 3[6]

South Africa continues to experience one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates globally, with young women and girls disproportionately impacted.[31] Studies have shown that accurate knowledge about HIV transmission is critical for prevention. While many South African youth have some knowledge of HIV, gaps and myths persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Efforts to improve the accuracy of HIV knowledge, particularly among youth and vulnerable groups, are seen as essential to reducing new infections.[32] In addition, addressing SRHR alongside HIV education is essential for comprehensive prevention and empowerment outcomes. The Undaunted Programme's interventions were designed not merely to improve knowledge about HIV, but also to equip girls with practical understanding of SRHR, including contraceptive use, safer sex negotiation, and understanding of reproductive choices. These SRHR components are integral to tackling related issues such as unintended teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, and promoting agency over personal health decisions[7]. On this basis, the project's objective to raise HIV/AIDS awareness among girls in South Africa (result area 1) appear aligned and relevant to the needs of the target population (e.g. young women in South Africa).

The integration of MHM in schools shows relevance to the needs of adolescent girls in South Africa, particularly those at risk of absenteeism due to menstrual hygiene challenges. By targeting learners in grades 4–7, the intervention was aligned with evidence showing that menstrual-related barriers to education often begin early and can have lasting impacts on school participation and completion. Additionally, the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education that encompasses MHM aligns with national priorities, as discussed earlier in this report.

The survey (shown in the sections below) asked respondents to identify which activities they found most useful from the programme, offering multiple choice options that included activities from all result areas—even if the respondents may not have directly participated in all activities. As a result, the answers reflect not only the perceived relevance and usefulness of the activities themselves but may also capture participants' impressions of the programme delivery modalities, including aspects like logistics and delivery. This means that while the data provides insight into which areas beneficiaries valued, it may also be influenced by broader experiences with the programme, such as accessibility, communication, and the effectiveness of delivery methods. The relevance of the result area 1 activities, provided by Agape/DBE and MIET, can be partially assessed through the survey responses presented in the graph. The data show that, among those who participated, urban respondents (N=95) and female respondents (N=72) to a greater extent identified both HIV awareness and menstrual health activities as useful, with 54 and 51 urban respondents selecting these areas respectively, and 40 and 42 female respondents doing the same. In contrast, only 2 and 1 rural respondents (N=5), and 16 and 10 male respondents (N=28), identified these activities as most useful.[8].

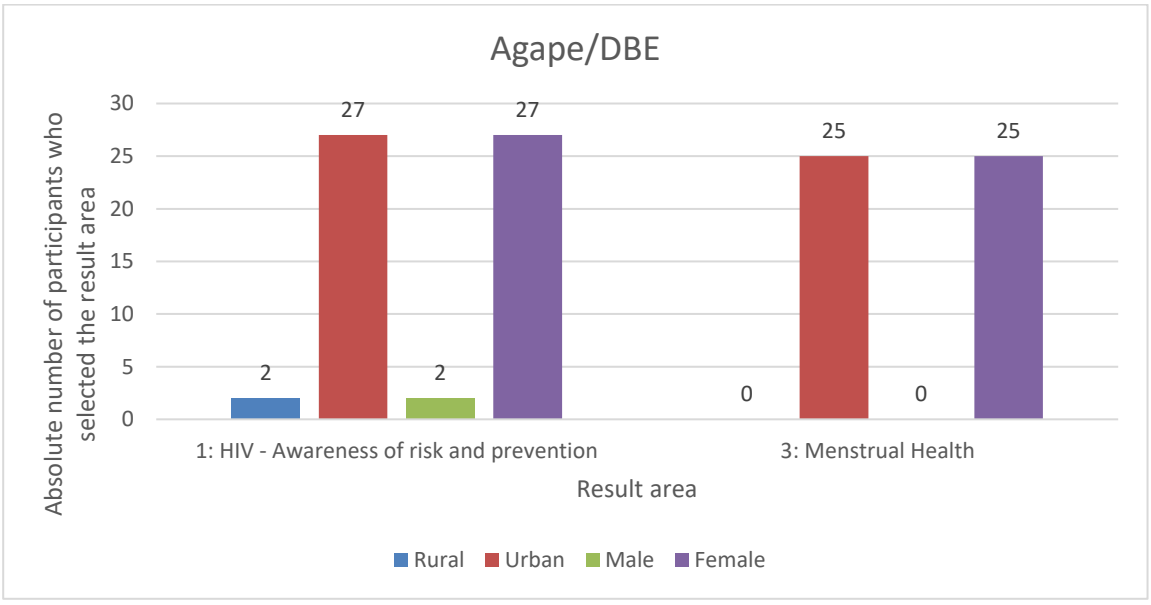

Figure 2: Survey responses from AGAPE/DBE participants: "Which activities did you feel were the most useful from the programme?" (Rural N=3, Urban N=35, Male N=2, Female N=36)

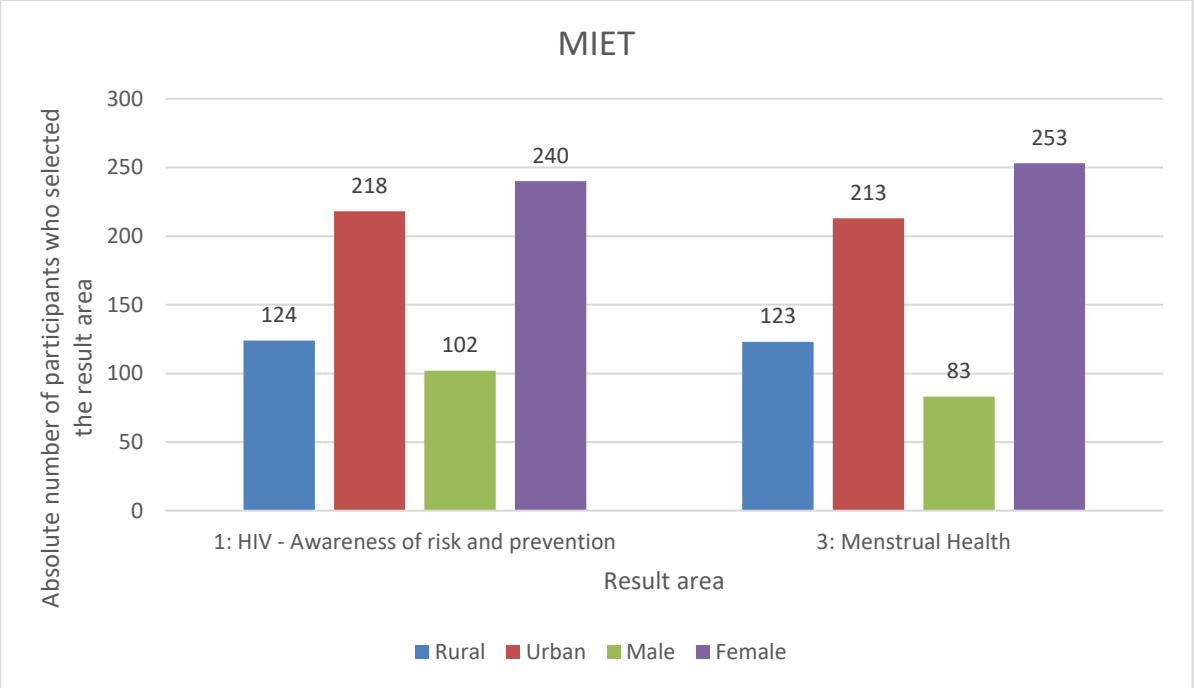

Figure 3: Survey responses from MIET participants: "Which activities did you feel were the most useful from the programme?" (Rural N=146, Urban N=265, Male N=119[9], Female N=292

Figure 3 shows that, in absolute terms, female respondents' activities under result areas 1 and 3 as useful, with over 220 responses for each. Urban respondents also rated both activities highly, with close to 200 responses for each (out of total 258 females). Rural respondents and males reported lower numbers, with rural responses just above 120 for each activity and male responses below 100 for both[10].

The data from the survey suggest that both HIV risk awareness and menstrual health activities were perceived as useful across beneficiary groups, with relatively strong endorsement from both rural and urban participants, and from both males and females, when considering their respective group sizes. The prominence of menstrual health being selected by female respondents aligns with the specific needs and priorities of adolescent girls, particularly in the context of South Africa's challenges with menstrual hygiene and school absenteeism (whereas the menstrual health activities were likely not perceived as a need for their male counterparts).

However, while the context of high HIV prevalence and adolescent pregnancy in South Africa underscores the need for targeted HIV/AIDS education, it is essential to recognise that simply increasing awareness does not automatically lead to behaviour change among adolescents. Several of the beneficiaries who took part in the survey noted that they already had the information related to HIV/AIDS and SRHR, and that the programme was a repetition of things they already knew. In the words of one implementing partner staff interviewed:

> *"When we start the first sessions with them, they will immediately ask if you are going to talk to them about sex. You can tell that they are bored because every stakeholder who comes talks about the same topic. They thought we were going to teach them about something they already know." (Implementing Partner staff in KII)*

[9] Men and boys were not the primary target group of the programme; however, they were included in some sessions on MHM due to the integration of these topics within the Life Orientation curriculum and the classroom-based delivery modality. The results from male participants should be interpreted with caution, as boys and men may not have been present in all relevant activities and may not have engaged with or shown interest in the MHM content, which was not the intended focus of the programme. Their participation was ancillary, and promoting MHM awareness or outcomes among males was not among the main objectives of the intervention

[10] These results must be interpreted with caution due to the differing group sizes. The female and urban groups are much larger than the male and rural groups, so their higher numbers largely reflect their greater representation in the sample rather than necessarily greater perceived usefulness

"We were already taught about self-confidence and other things and when the program started, they taught us everything from the start." (Female, 22, Valwaater, Limpopo)

This, to some extent points to the fact that an assumption of a direct, linear relationship between knowledge and behaviour fails to account for the complex realities in which girls make health-related decisions. Choices around HIV prevention and pregnancy are deeply relational and shaped by socio-cultural norms, power dynamics, family expectations, and broader structural inequalities, particularly for those in disadvantaged, rural, or marginalized communities. KII informants also noted that broader social and structural barriers, such as persistent poverty, entrenched gender inequality, and limited access to essential services including water, sanitation, and healthcare, often hinder regular school attendance for girls. These factors may have influenced the perceived overall relevance of HIV/AIDS and MHM education interventions.

Result area 2

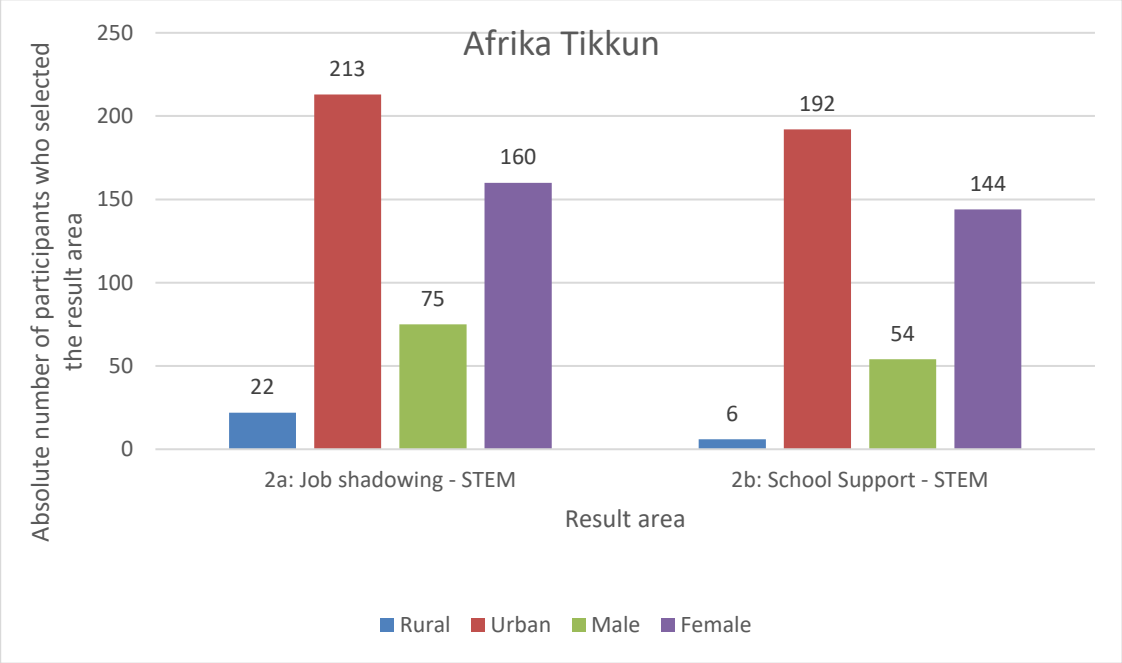

Figure 4: Survey responses from Afrika Tikkun participants: "Which activities did you feel were the most useful from the programme?" (Rural N=24, Urban N=302, Male N=99, Female N=227)

Survey data from Afrika Tikkun, as shown in figure 4, show that the majority of respondents identified job shadowing and school support in STEM as useful were urban (N=303) and female (N=228). Specifically, over 200 urban and about 160 female respondents selected job shadowing as useful, while nearly 200 urban and about 140 female respondents did so for school support.

Rural survey participants (N=25) represented a small fraction of the sample. The Covid-19 pandemic further exposed and intensified existing digital inequalities, which informants of this evaluation noted constrained participation among rural learners, affecting the sample size for rural participants. According to a 2022 UNICEF alumni survey, less than half of programme alumni reported having access to the internet and necessary technology, highlighting persistent disparities—particularly for girls in rural and underserved communities.

The coaching component of result area 2, was also disrupted due to the unavailability of in-school coaches and restrictions on job-shadowing opportunities. In response, the programme introduced online coaching initiatives for senior learners and prepared for virtual job-shadowing. However, access

challenges—especially for rural learners and those with disabilities—remained significant, with barriers related to infrastructure, resources, and social factors limiting participation among marginalized groups.

Despite these challenges and limitations, the survey data suggest that both job shadowing and school support in STEM were perceived as useful by a substantial portion of participants, especially young women and those in urban areas. This aligns with South Africa's broader priorities to promote STEM for youth, particularly girls, and to address urban-rural disparities in educational access. However, the small sample sizes for rural and male respondents mean that robust conclusions about their experiences and needs cannot be drawn from this data.

Relevance for persons with disabilities

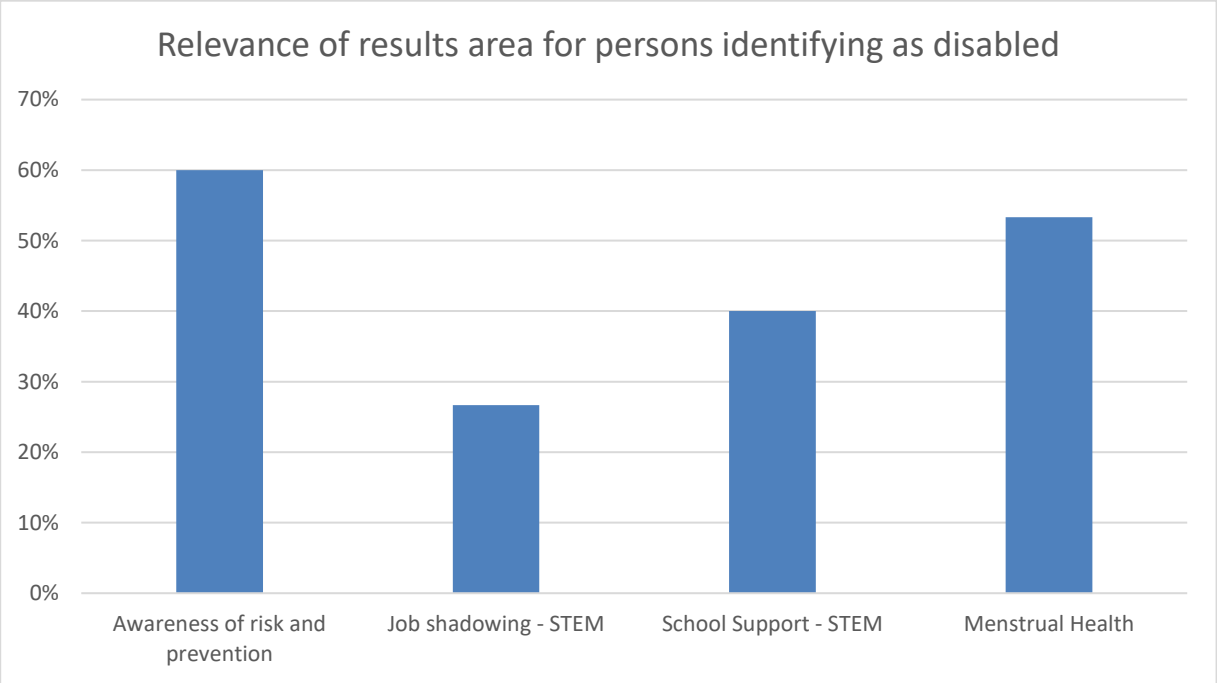

Figure 5: Indication of the usefulness of activity area for persons surveyed who identify as having a disability. N=15.

Figure 5 illustrates the perceived relevance of different programme result areas among participants identifying as disabled (N=15). According to the data, "Awareness of risk and prevention" was rated as relevant by the highest proportion of respondents, with 60% indicating its usefulness. "Menstrual Health" was also highly valued, with 53% of respondents identifying it as relevant. "School Support – STEM" was seen as relevant by 40% of respondents, while "Job shadowing – STEM" received the lowest relevance rating at 27%.

These findings suggest that health-related interventions, particularly HIV risk awareness and menstrual health, were considered particularly pertinent by disabled participants. This may reflect the heightened vulnerabilities and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing accurate health information and services. The comparatively lower ratings for STEM-related activities, especially job shadowing, could indicate ongoing challenges in accessing or benefiting from these opportunities, potentially due to physical, infrastructural, or attitudinal barriers within educational and workplace environments.

3.1.4 Reflections on the ToC

The ToC for the Undaunted Programme outlines the following logical sequence: if targeted interventions in HIV/AIDS education, STEM engagement, and menstrual health management are delivered in schools and communities with strong stakeholder engagement and supportive policy environments, then girls will gain the knowledge, agency, and skills needed for improved school retention, reduced absenteeism, and strengthened protection against early pregnancy and HIV. The reader is requested to revisit appendix 3 for the full visual ToC.

Findings from surveys and qualitative work broadly support several of the ToC pathways: female and urban participants highly valued HIV/AIDS and menstrual health interventions, and young women benefited from STEM activities, particularly in urban areas. Respondents with disabilities found health education especially relevant, indicating partial progress on inclusion. However, persistent barriers, such as infrastructural shortcomings, digital divides, and attitudinal challenges, limited full realisation of intended outcomes, especially in rural settings and among persons with disabilities. Of key to note is the assumption that knowledge will lead to change, whereas respondents noted that the interventions were not always perceived as relevant, as they already had the knowledge. Achieving behavioural outcomes would require a multi-pronged approach that addresses several levels of the socioecological framework, combining the provision of accurate information with ready access to condoms and health services, as well as deliberate efforts to shift prevailing social norms.

3.2 Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

The following sections present the findings to four evaluation questions under efficiency:

1. What are the costs associated with the programme?
2. Are financial resources spent in line with plan (budget and on time)?
3. To what extent did the intervention across the core programme areas deliver results cost-effectively?
4. How were the activities delivered with fewer resources to the target populations without reducing their quality and quantity?

Key Findings

1. Lack of comprehensive financial data prevented a full cost and expenditure assessment. Available financial documentation did not include a complete itemised budget for the programme period or implementing partner–level expenditure records. This meant the evaluation could not verify whether spending patterns aligned with the budget or assess cost-to-output relationships.

2. Budget execution was significantly delayed, with accelerated spending in the final year. Additionally, spending patterns shifted between result areas, reflecting implementation challenges and adaptations.

3. Equity, efficiency and value-for-money could not be robustly assessed. Without clear annual targets, linked outputs, or unit cost tracking, it was impossible to measure whether budget allocations delivered proportional results or to compare cost-efficiency across result areas.

Evidence Sources and Triangulation

The analysis drew on:

- Financial records from UNICEF showing total and category-level spending, plus budget-to-actual breakdowns by result area and activity.
- Donor annual reports providing aggregate budget allocations but limited performance-linked cost data.
- KII evidence from implementing partners detailing cost-related challenges and reasons for underspend or delays.
- Document review of programme agreements, budgets, and expenditure summaries to verify allocations and identify re-prioritisations.

3.2.1 The available financial data and reporting provided was not sufficient to thoroughly assess of cost and expenditure

As there is limited comprehensive itemized budget or reports on spending throughout the programme period, the evaluation team could not do a thorough assessment of cost and expenditure. The evaluation team has received individual reports which in some cases cover expenditure. These have been used for the basis of this assessment.

The largest share of the financing was used on transfers to the implementing partners, such as grants to MIET Africa (73% of total transfers), Agape, and Techno Girl Trust[11]. It is not clear whether this is line with the budget, as a detailed budget on that level was not provided. The team was also not given access to the financial data of implementing agencies, so no detailed analysis of implementing agencies' spending was possible.

Table 5: Spending category and amount

Spending category	USD amount as of November 2024 (% share of total)
Transfers and Grants to Counterparts	1,265,315 (35%)
Contractual Services	1,189,177 (33%)
Staff and Other Personnel Costs	617,826 (17%)
General Operating + Other Direct Costs	277,912 (8%)
Travel	175,938 (5%)
Supplies and Commodities	59,812 (2%)
Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture	19,725 (1%)

Of the total budget, UNICEF took an 8% portion as overheads, which is in line with industry standards. Dubbed *HQ recovery cost*, the 8% of the programme budget was used by UNICEF to cover overhead costs beyond what is covered by the direct cost. This included things like computer systems, infrastructure, insurance, and everything that is not direct staff time. This is industry standard, and comparable to other programmes[33].

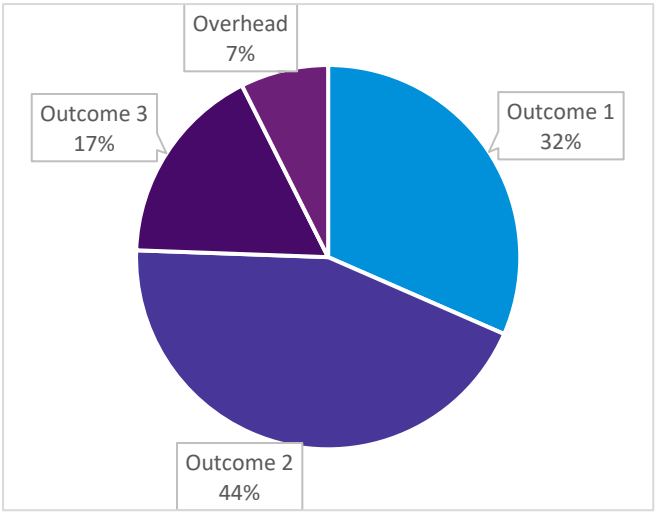

Figure 6: Breakdown of programme budget by component (result area)

[11] For this evaluation, only Agape, MIET and Afrika Tikkun were included in the scope. As such, the evaluation team has not reviewed achievements or expenditures for Techno Girl Trust, or other partners.

There are anecdotal examples of costs that were not covered by the programme, causing issues to implementation. From interviews with implementing partners, examples of challenges with implementation due to budget limitations emerge. For example, under the job shadowing activities, no funding was provided for the costs of transportation, which limited participants ability to travel. In particular, the budget did not allow for sending learners to valuable placements if they were located far from training centres. This could have potential negative distributional effects, as the most resource-constrained participants are not able to follow the programme (while wealthier participants *are* able), not aligned with a 'leave no one behind'-approach. However, there is no systematic evidence collected on costs that excluded potential beneficiaries from participating.

3.2.2 The majority of spending was delayed compared to the initial plan

While the evaluation team did not have access to disaggregated financial data per year, data from March 2023 and November 2024 was analysed. Considering the programme ran from 2018-2024[12], spending under the programme was significantly delayed, with only 43% of the programme budget spent as of March 2023. By the near-end of the programme in November 2024, spending was at 96%, meaning the programme managed to spend the budget in the final year.

Some adjustments in expenditure were made during the programme implementation period, in particular result area 2 spent less of the funding than planned, while result area 1 and 3 overspent. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, activities under result area 2[13] had to move to an online model, which was cheaper to implement. Furthermore, the collaboration with the TechnoGirl Initiative was terminated. The savings were distributed to activities under result area 1 and 3.

Table 6: Outcome and activities, with associated budgets

[12] The reader should note that the scope of this evaluation was 2018-2023, but certain parts of the financial data has been reviewed until 2024.

[13] The budget allocated to Afrika Tikkun (result area 2) appeared disproportionately small in relation to the scale of their programme implementation. The evaluation team is unable to confirm the accuracy of this allocation.

Outcome/activity	BUDGET TOTAL	*Share of total*	SPENDING TOTAL (as of 13 Nov 2024)	*Share of total*
Outcome 1: Increase the awareness of 100,000 girls of the risks of HIV/AIDS through comprehensive HIV/AIDS education in schools	**1,271,743**	***34 %***	**1,634,591**	***46 %***
1. Advocacy for the provision of sexual and reproductive health services in schools	515,000	*14 %*	457,676	*13 %*
2. Harnessing the power of digital media in tackling HIV/AIDS	329,000	*9 %*	421,008	*12 %*
3. Youth Leadership in education, gender equality, and HIV/AIDS prevention	344,500	*9 %*	707,645	*20 %*
4. Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation	83,243	*2 %*	48,262	*1 %*
Outcome 2: Provide job-shadowing in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) opportunities to 5,000 under-privileged girls	**1,773,872**	***48 %***	**1,010,509**	***28 %***
1. Recruitment of under-privileged adolescent girls for job-shadowing opportunities	584,000	*16 %*	616,372	*17 %*
2. Establish an in-school STEM coaching programme for girls	460,000	*12 %*	287,052	*8 %*
3. Provide additional education and psychosocial support for TechnoGirl Alumni	310,000	*8 %*	37,384	*1 %*
4. Engage Technogirls in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts	265,500	*7 %*	19,590	*1 %*
5. Strengthen networking and placement tracking of Technogirls	64,000	*2 %*	6,975	*0 %*
6. Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation	90,372	*2 %*	43,135	*1 %*
Outcome 3: Increase the knowledge and skills of 1.3 million adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene management (MHM) so that they can complete their education	**686,000**	***18 %***	**942,895**	***26 %***
1. Research conducted on the link between absenteeism and MHM	5,000	*0 %*	2,969	*0 %*
2. Increase the knowledge and skills of adolescent girls on MHM	250,500	*7 %*	410,455	*11 %*
3. Final year evaluation	60,000	*2 %*	1,434	*0 %*
4. Technical support	300,000	*8 %*	402,515	*11 %*
5. Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation	70,500	2 %	125,522	*3 %*
Total	3,731,615		3,587,995	

Inevitable delays to implementation were caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, but spending compared to budget was already lagging before Covid -19 started. It is not clear what was behind these delays, as the evaluation team was not given access to donor reports pre-2020. Some non-pandemic related delays mentioned by implementing partners include: delays in approvals (for example by UMALUSI (Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training) coding and robotics curriculum), limits to connectivity/infrastructure/internet access for some online components, delays in producing the GBEM Web App, and other small individual challenges. These delays were further exacerbated by the pandemic, which had large impacts on the planned implementation of activities (considering disruptions to the school system and the broader economy as a whole).

Table 7: Budget by year

	2018	2019	2020
Budget	953,993	928,000	930,050
Cumulative	*953,993*	*1,881,993*	*2,812,043*
Actual expenditure	350,751	551,043	502,966
Cumulative	*350,751*	*901,794*	*1,404,760*

It is not clear whether the planned objectives were achieved within the planned budget, as there is no systematic overview of whether the programme achieved its objectives (see section 3.4). Therefore, while the programme eventually spent the planned budget, there is insufficient evidence on whether this budget was in line with the costs required to achieve the objectives.

3.2.3 Lack of disaggregated financial data hampered cost-efficiency analysis

An analysis of cost efficiency or value for money would compare the achievements of the programme with the costs and assesses whether the costs incurred in achieving the recorded outputs, outcomes and impacts were commensurate. Because financial data is not available at disaggregated levels, the evaluation team has not been able to compare funding by program area to results by program area or calculate unit costs for results, and thus unable to present a cost analysis comparing costs to similar interventions, standards, or alternative delivery options, or calculate cost-effectiveness of interventions. In lieu of this, the evaluation team has considered aspects of the programme that were likely effective, and ones that are less cost effective, based on interviews with implementing partners and beneficiaries, in order to draw out lessons for future programming.

Aspects of the programme structure were deemed positive in terms of cost efficiency. These include:

- Using existing government structures for programme delivery: The programme is based on existing official South African school structures such as the Girls and Boys Empowerment Movement and the Representative Council of Learners. The programme was designed as a co-curricular initiative, supporting the curriculum through existing school governance structures. Implementing the programme through existing structures has allowed the programme to leverage for example teacher time and infrastructure that has not been covered by the programme, thus improving cost efficiency.
- Using other existing institutions: Specific activities under the programme were able to leverage other institutions such as school-based social clubs to recruit participants and deliver content.
- Local implementing partners: The use of local implementing partners is likely to have been a cost-effective way of providing support, compared to for example more use of international experts from within UNICEF or externally.
- Co-financing from implementing partners: Some costs of implementation were covered by implementing partners, which represent cost-saving for the programme. For example, in UNICEF's contract with MIET, the largest implementing agency, MIET funds 12.5% of the total project costs (around USD 100,000).
- Potential for scaling up piloted approaches in the future: The knowledge and learning provided to beneficiaries during the programme, and the lessons learned for the implementing partners and the UNICEF Country Office, could be used to scale up efforts in the future – so-called demonstration effects. By taking stock of what worked and didn't work, future programming could benefit from costs incurred through the programme. However, the extent to which this happens depends on whether the lessons are recorded and used to inform future programming, and whether the activities actually can and are scaled up.

Other aspects of the programme structure could have been less positive in terms of cost efficiency. These include:

- The programme appears to have been an "umbrella" for providing funding to already planned projects, as opposed to a newly designed programme. A more coherent approach, for example by targeting the same areas/schools, could have enjoyed synergetic effects.
- Delays, caused by Covid -19 or otherwise, lead to inefficient spending. Delays in implementation mean costs that are more less fixed, like programme staff time, continue running while little progress is made in the project itself. Significant delays due to Covid-19 led to inefficient spending, which was unforeseen, but delays prior to the pandemic have the same effect, and were more possible to avoid/predict with better planning.

3.3 Effectiveness: Did the intervention achieve its objectives?

The following sections present the findings to four evaluation questions under effectiveness:

1. How useful were the indicators included in the results framework? How regularly was the monitoring of key indicators in the results framework conducted throughout the programme period? What were some of the routine challenges experienced with indicators in the results framework?
2. What are the major achievements and results of the programme?
3. What measures were undertaken and/or are required to improve the capacity of the project partners?
4. How satisfied or dissatisfied were the men and women beneficiaries with the interventions they received under this programme?

Key findings

- The link between implementing partners' activities and UNICEF's consolidated results reporting was unclear, and was fragmented and inconsistent across programme areas.
- Programme indicators measured outputs like participation and reach, providing limited insight into behavioural or systemic change.
- High satisfaction was however reported among participants, indicating that those reached valued the interventions.
- Socio-economic barriers and digital connectivity issues limited equitable access for beneficiaries.

Evidence Source and Triangulation

Evidence was triangulated through multiple sources: a review of the results framework, donor annual reports, partner quarterly reports, and available monitoring visit notes. KIIs with UNICEF staff, partners, and government counterparts provided qualitative insights into monitoring practices and indicator gaps. FGDs with beneficiaries corroborated reported achievements and surfaced behavioural change challenges. Survey data added a quantitative snapshot of participation and self-reported change, but did not align precisely with official indicators. The reader is requested to review section 2.4 for limitations in the evidence

3.3.1 Despite adaptive M&E strategies, consolidated programme reporting was fragmented

The results reporting for the Undaunted Programme available for this evaluation was limited. There was a lack of documentation showcasing the systematic and consolidated tracking of results on the programme level, tracking achievements by results area on an annual and cumulative basis. The absence of clearly defined targets for each indicator within the overall programmatic results framework further complicates the assessment of programme achievements. For a more detailed analysis of results, please refer to section 3.3.2.

The Implementing Partners reported a set of indicators and targets to UNICEF at agreed-upon intervals, as evidenced by documentation provided to the evaluation team. These mutually agreed results frameworks were utilized when partners submitted quarterly results reports to UNICEF, showcasing results achievement overtime. Where these quarterly reports were available to the evaluation team, they have generally been clear and measurable. Despite this clarity at the partner level, it remains unclear how these reports have been consolidated and integrated into higher level reporting from UNICEF. Furthermore, donor reports have typically lacked specific indicator targets, aside from the overall objective of reaching a defined number of girls across the three results areas. The flow of results data from the implementing partner level to the overall donor reporting level, lacks a clear vertical logic. We refer to the figures provided in section 3.3.2, as further illustration of the discrepancy between the indicator achievement reported by Implementing Partners, and the donor reports compiled by UNICEF.

UNICEF commissioned the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit specifically for the Girls Empowerment Programme included in the Undaunted Programme umbrella. The M&E Toolkit aimed to improve the assessment and measurement of intermediate impacts on participants of the online/remote life-skills intervention. This initiative was taken in response to the M&E challenges that arose with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period, UNICEF and partners quite quickly changed key programming to online modalities, showcasing adaptive management capabilities, and the M&E Toolkit was one of multiple initiatives to adapt M&E efforts to the change in implementation modalities. Generally, while stakeholders from UNICEF and implementing partners found the results framework and indicators intuitive, tracking results overtime was challenging for parties involved due to participant graduation and shifts among implementing partners.

Additionally, the indicators used in the Undaunted Programme primarily focus on measuring the participation and reach of programme activities. However, these indicators offer a less robust framework for assessing changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Stakeholders interviewed pointed out that the results framework lacks the necessary components to measure behavioural changes that lead to desired health outcomes, such as reductions in HIV rates or STIs. While programme participation might suggest increased knowledge, the absence of post-participation surveys or longitudinal tracking has been identified as a barrier to evaluating the programme's actual effectiveness.

3.3.2 Tracking of consolidated achievements per results area is limited

As stated in section 3.3.1, the Undaunted programme's results reporting is limited overall, particularly the tracking of achievements per results area annually, cumulatively, and systematically, per indicator and compared to baselines and targets.

The evaluation team has, however, received an annual donor report giving the overview of results achieved according to the results framework for 2023, which reports cumulative results per indicator in the approved results framework for the full implementation period. The available donor reporting does not have targets for indicators, beyond the overall target for girls to be reached per result area. The evaluation team has used this report, alongside reports from programmatic monitoring visits and reports from implementing partners, to undertake a full mappsing of results reported in accordance with the overall results framework, per the distinct results areas (Appendix 7 – Results tracking). The following sections provide an overview of the mapped results reporting, which is then complimented with insights generated from KIIs, FGDs and the survey administered as part of the evaluation.

Result Area 1

Result area 1 had the overall goal of providing 100,000 girls with increased awareness of risks and prevention of HIV/AIDS through comprehensive HIV/AIDS education in schools. Activities relating to Result area 1 were implemented by Agape/DBE and MIET in partnership with UNICEF. Overall, and considering findings from the document review, KIIs and FGDs and survey, there is no clear basis to state whether the overall goal of reaching 100,000 girls under Results Area 1 has been achieved or not. There are, however, indications that the programme interacted with many stakeholders on the topic of HIV/AIDS and is likely to have conveyed awareness messaging broadly.

The available results reporting from MIET, illustrated in Figure 7 and shown in full detail in Appendix 7, shows that the targets under five out of ten indicators were fully achieved and even surpassed. Three indicators had some achievement, falling short of the target, whereas the remaining two had zero achievement. Overall, the results reporting indicated that the activities implemented by MIET led to output-level achievements, contributing to overall results achievements under result area 1.

MIET reports, submitted to UNICEF, were not explicitly referenced in the 2023 annual donor report generated by UNICEF. The annual donor report generated by UNICEF, as mentioned in earlier sections, does not state targets for the various indicators under result area 1, making a comparison of results vis a vis targets impossible. However, the overview of reporting shows that a high number of schools were involved in Girls and Boys Empowerment Movement clubs and anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, and that wider school communities were reached through activities.

Informants interviewed noted that plans to monitor the effectiveness of Life Orientation teaching in a sample of schools were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The resulting school closures shifted the focus to curriculum recovery when schools reopened, which impacted the delivery of key programme components. Peer-to-peer life skills programmes like the Girls and Boys Empowerment Movement, which relied heavily on in-person interaction, were also disrupted. Although the programme attempted to continue these activities through digital platforms, limited access to devices and data among disadvantaged learners—particularly in rural areas—significantly constrained reach and scale.

The modality of supporting Learner Support Assistants (LSAs) was underlined by educators as a notable and effective way of reaching learners. The LSAs were considered to be emotionally supportive, involved in drug prevention, coaching, and liaising with the district office, going beyond expected duties. The presence of an LSA positively impacts learners' confidence, particularly for girls, by providing guidance on important social issues.

The shift to online implementation also led to a shift in focus of the programme. As stated by key informants of this evaluation, there were considerations made that online safety and mental health was a pertinent need for young persons who were confined in their homes, and the programme therefore focused heavily on online safety when it shifted online (primarily provided by Agape/the DBE). The shift of both the modality of delivery and the content of the Life Orientation teaching programme was a side-step from the original intention of the result area, aiming to focus on HIV/AIDS. Per one implementing partners' staff statement: *"what the documents say and what we implemented don't really speak directly to one another".* One implementing partner stated that the content of their contribution was only "*very surface level the issues of sexual rights and health*", indicating a weak link to the overall goals and theory of change of the programme.

Additionally, online implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic proved less effective than desired. Implementing partners and UNICEF spent considerable financial and human resources buying data bundles for participants to join online sessions, but due to connectivity issues, lack of communication and clarity, or lack of learner commitment, attendance was a continuous challenge during online implementation. Beneficiaries in rural locations particularly struggled with attendance. Some sessions had to be redone due to insufficient learner attendance. There was a consistent loss of 20-40 learners who were enrolled but did not attend sessions. The challenge was described by a staff of Agape:

> *"100 Learners will indicate they are coming for the session; you buy them data, and they don't show up. Some learners didn't take the online learning seriously, but if the teachers are proactive and attend the sessions, they can see that out of 10 learners, only a certain number of learners are attending, and then they can do a follow-up with those not attending."*

Implementers noted that although the attendance was not at the desired level, discussions even in online sessions among attendees demonstrated a "spark" and interest in topics such as online safety and cyberbullying.

Although the programme's reach and scale were impacted by the pandemic, reflections derived from the KIIs, FGDs, and survey further demonstrate that those who were reached by the intervention recall that the programme increased their understanding of risks and prevention of HIV/AIDS. The importance of being aware and having knowledge about protection and transmissions, in order to effectively protect oneself, was emphasized throughout data collection.

Implementing Partner	Result identified in available reporting					Source
	Sub-outcome/output (as applicable)	Indicator phrasing	Target	Achieved	Achievement vs. Target	
MIET	Output 2: 48,000 Learners from 120 School Communities have increased awareness of risks and prevention of HIV, STIs and teenage pregnancy through comprehensive sexual education and access to SRHR services in schools	No. of schools and communities that have received messages on SRH, including condoms	120	201	168 %	MIET Programmatic check, July 2022
		No. of focus group discussions conducted to identify advocacy messages - National	1	-	0 %	
		# No. of focus group discussions conducted to identify advocacy messages - Provincial	15	4	27 %	
		Availability of advocacy campaign pack	1	1	100 %	
		# Consultations held on provision of SRHR-services to learners in secondary schools	120	163	136 %	
		No of Advocacy events held (2p/a x 3 districts/ 3 years) such as integrated service delivery events/roadshows with 9 community radio on site (outside broadcast): 1 per district per annum)	18	33	183 %	
		# of Advocacy Events held (45 community radio 60sec x 1 set live reads (1 set=5 per week) (10 sets per annum x 3 districts x 3 years)	45	-	0 %	
		# of Advocacy Events (4800 social media posts)	4 800	310	6 %	
		# of Advocacy Events held (14400 WhatsApp messaging)	14 400	1 214	8 %	
		Proportion of schools agreeing to provide SRHR services at school	80 %	333 %	416 %	
Overall reporting by UNICEF - AGAPE/DBE and MIET		# of focus groups/interview held		7	N/A	2023 Annual report
	Action 1: Advocating for the provision of condoms and SRH-services in schools	Advocacy campaign designed	N/A	Designed in 2021	N/A	
		# school community stakeholders reached through cc	N/A	398 schools. 1 277 566 in 2023 2 753 565 cumulative	N/A	
		# of advocacy events held on national and community	N/A	1626 cumulative	N/A	
	Action 2: Harnessing the power of digital media to address HIV and AIDS	HIV/AIDS campaign using digital media designed, and	N/A	5300 cumulative girls and boys engaged with campaigns on the GBEM Facebook page. 1655 cumulative girls and boys have access to HIV and AIDS skill content on the Learning Passport	N/A	
		# of girls trained on designed campaign	N/A	46 learners (20 males, 26 females) were trained on the Youth Advocacy Guide and are rolling out in-person and digital campaigns in their schools	N/A	
		# of supportive materials developed	N/A	1 newsletter highlighting interventions addressing HIV and AIDS was published. Other material was developed by leaners for their own school campaigns	N/A	
	Action 3: Youth Leadership in HIV and AIDS Prevention: The Girls' and Boys' Education Movements (GBEMs)	# of girls trained on youth leadership	N/A	620 learners of which 496 (80%) were young girls were trained	N/A	
		# of girls infected who receive peer-to-peer support	N/A	N/A	N/A	
		# of GBEM clubs active in the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign	N/A	112 UNICEF supported schools	N/A	
		# of teachers capacitated as GBEM facilitators	N/A	252 educators and LSA's	N/A	

Figure 7: Overview of available results reporting - Result area 1

Result Area 2

Result area 2 had the overall goal that 5,000 adolescent girls from underprivileged schools benefit from job-shadowing in STEMs in private and public companies and in school support, labelled as the *"Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (TechnoGirl) programme".* However, as shown in Figure 8 and in more detail in Appendix 7, the programme in 2021 no longer supported the TechoGirls initiative. Despite this, result area 2 continued to focus on STEM-related job shadowing and school support, implemented by Afrika Tikkun in collaboration with UNICEF.

Afrika Tikkun successfully met and exceeded 11 out of 13 indicator targets measuring their achievements, according to the results reporting available to the evaluation team. Nevertheless, a discrepancy was noted between the indicators used by Afrika Tikkun for implementation and the overall results indicators and targets set by UNICEF for the Undaunted programme. While Afrika Tikkun's reporting emphasized enrolment and completion of various courses, UNICEF's framework aimed at higher-level outcomes, such as actual employment following the intervention.

Consequently, the results reported in UNICEF's overall annual donor report showed a lower level of achievement compared to Afrika Tikkun's report. The indicator "*# of new companies recruited into the programme (150) to provide job shadowing"* presented a significant challenge, as interviews revealed that recruiting relevant firms was a bottleneck for achieving other results in the job shadowing component.

The job shadowing component, which originally had an explicit STEM focus, gradually shifted during implementation, to include businesses and job shadowing opportunities that were STEM adjacent. This led to a watering out of the achievements under the Results Area, because many of the job shadowing opportunities that were provided to girls, were not STEM opportunities. KPMG does not have evidence or documentation about the proportion of job shadowing opportunities that were non-STEM and characterised as STEM-related.

Result area 2, particularly its job shadowing component, was reportedly resource-intensive to implement, due to the considerable staff-time required to recruit business to partake as job shadowing sites. Even before the Covid lockdowns, recruiting relevant job shadowing opportunities posed a challenge for effective implementation. The component relied on assumptions that relevant opportunities would be generated at a rate difficult to achieve in practice. The focus on reaching girls in rural areas, where STEM-related workplaces were scarce, and the limited network of the implementing partner with STEM businesses, led to early delays in the job shadowing component, as reported by UNICEF. Stakeholders interviewed also noted reluctance among girls and their communities regarding travel to locations closer to STEM-relevant companies due to financial and perceived safety risks. Matching girls in rural settings with STEM-related opportunities thus proved challenging. The difficulty in finding relevant job shadowing opportunities led to placements in tourism, game farming, and retail, among others. Although beneficiaries generally found these placements useful (see section 3.4 - Impact), they did not directly contribute to the overall aims of result area 2.

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, the nature of the work shifted from formal job shadowing to inviting speakers from interesting fields for motivational talks, as workplace visits were not feasible. As a result, planned practical job shadowing sessions became theory-based. Although this adaptation was necessary during strict lockdown measures, it impacted results achievement.

Results from the STEM support in schools component are less discernible from results reporting and interviews, as respondents focused on job shadowing when discussing result area 2. Section 3.4 – Impact further details the outcomes of the job shadowing and other STEM-related activities highlighted by survey respondents.

Implementing Partner	Result identified in available reporting					Source
	Sub-outcome/output (as applicable)	Indicator phrasing	Target	Achieved	Achievement vs. Target	
Afrika Tikkun	Output: Participation of young people in Youth Accelerator Program (YAP) increased	Attendance registers, test results and Afrika Tikkun Certificate	200	559	280 %	Progress report 8, October 2023
		# of grade 12 learners who have participated in and completed a basic computer literacy course	300	545	182 %	
		# of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who have participated in and completed a basic computer literacy course.	310	579	187 %	
		# of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who have participated in and completed a Basic Conditions of Employment and Labour Relations (BCELR) course.	310	412	133 %	
		# of grade 9 learners who have completed the Vision Boarding and Personal Development Plan..	200	315	158 %	
		# of grade 12 learners who have completed the Vision Boarding and Personal Development Plan.	300	332	111 %	
		# of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who have who have completed the Vision Boarding and Personal Development Plan	310	124	40 %	
	Output: Participation of Young people in the Holiday Job Shadowing, with a specific focus on the Child and Youth Development Programme Specific (CYD) increased	# of grade 9 learners who have attended the Virtual Career Expo to gain knowledge about career opportunities.	200	213	107 %	
		# of grade 12 learners who have attended the Virtual Career Expo to gain knowledge about career opportunities	300	292	97 %	
		# of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who have attended the Virtual Career Expo to gain knowledge about career opportunities	310	320	103 %	
		# of grade 9 learners who have participated in a 3 week job Shadowing and skill development programme within the CYD programme.	200	287	144 %	
		# of grade 12 learners who have participated in a 3 week job Shadowing and skill development programme within the CYD programme	300	331	110 %	
		# of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who have participated in a 3 month job Shadowing and skill development programme within the CYD programme	310	330	106 %	
Overall reporting by UNICEF	Girl learners from disadvantaged background are recruited, selected for job shadowing placement	5,000 Girl learners from disadvantaged background secure mentorship/job shadowing opportunities with different companies	5000	2818	56 %	2023 Annual report
		# of new companies recruited into the programme (150) to provide job shadowing	150	23	15 %	
		# of girls receiving educational support in tertiary education (1,000)	1000	This activity was discontinued when the programme changed in 2021 and was no longer supporting the TechnoGirl initiative.	N/A	
		# of mentors in companies assigned to the girls (target 300)	300	250	83 %	
	A programme of in-school coaching to girls in STEM subjects initiated	# of coaches identified, trained and facilitated to provide coaching to girls # of Sessions held with 'Girls Who Code'	N/A	This activity was discontinued due to the challenge of forging a partnership with Girls Who Code, as it is an international organisation with no presence in SA. The cost implications for the programme were enormous.	N/A	
	Technogirl Alumni receive additional education support while at HEIs	5 000 girls (Technogirl Alumni) are supported. (This has been replaced by NEET)	5000	1073	21 %	
	Technogirls actively engaged in the fight against HIV and AIDS besides academics	# of Technogirl alumni actively engaged in anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns in: a). high schools; b). universities	N/A	This activity was discontinued when the programme changed in 2021 and was no longer supporting the TechnoGirl initiative.	N/A	
	Monitoring and evaluation of programme strengthened	Digital application developed for networking among girls, and aids record keeping and tracking of placement of alumni	N/A	This activity was discontinued when the programme changed in 2021 and was no longer supporting the TechnoGirl initiative.	N/A	

Figure 8: Overview of available results reporting - Result area 2

Result Area 3

Result area 3 aimed to increase the knowledge and skills in menstrual health management for 1,300,858 girls in the senior phase through promotion of menstrual hygiene in schools. This programming was implemented by MIET in partnership with UNICEF. Overall, MIET reporting indicates that 8 out of the 11 indicators on which they reported to UNICEF were achieved or surpassed. 105% of the targeted 1,300,858 girls were reached, directly and indirectly, through this programme component. However, the basis for concluding indirect and direct reach is not clear from the reporting.

Based on the reporting mapped in Table 8, the programme appears to have reached the targeted number of participants and equipped them with increased knowledge and skills in menstrual health management. However, as is clear from reporting and interviews, this assumed reach includes general advocacy messaging in schools and in wider communities and infrastructure upgrades. The assumption that 1,300,858 girls actually have increased knowledge and skills on menstrual health through this intervention, requires more thorough evidence to reach such a conclusion.

Barriers to the implementation of result area 3 included resistance from some school communities to open discussions about sexual and reproductive health and menstrual health management. This resistance delayed the broader rollout of MHM activities. In response, UNICEF initiated advocacy and communication campaigns to build community support and ensure wider acceptance and sustainability of MHM programming.

This evaluation finds that among those girls who were part of programming relating to menstrual health, there is a reported increase in confidence and knowledge. KIIs and FGDs undertaken as part of this evaluation, demonstrate that some of the target population found the interventions useful. Among other, a respondent in and FGD shared the following:

> *“Young women were helped to know how to handle themselves during menstruation and also to embrace their periods and not to be ashamed of them. Those with disabilities also benefited, as well as those in rural areas, by knowing good hygiene during menstruation periods.” (Respondent in FGD3)*

In practice, the intervention focused on improving WASH infrastructure and on providing menstrual pads, including reusable and washable pads. Teachers and some students interviewed stated that the improvement of school bathrooms was still giving benefits to the student populace a year after instalment.

During the implementation of the programme, a notable issue arose concerning the inclusion of boys in the sessions focused on menstrual health management for young girls, according to teachers and facilitators interviewed. The programme's mandate to educate girls and provide them with resources such as sanitary pads inadvertently led to feelings of exclusion among the boys. As the sessions were primarily directed at the girls, the boys perceived themselves as being overlooked, which resulted in disruptive behaviour and attempts to sabotage the sessions. In response to this challenge, the programme team explored adaptive strategies to foster inclusivity. One approach involved encouraging girls to share items from their received packages with the boys, aiming to bridge the gap and address the boys' sense of exclusion. This method proved effective in some schools, successfully mitigating the disruptive behaviour, while in other schools, the approach was met with resistance and refusal. These experiences highlight the setbacks encountered in ensuring equitable engagement and underscore the need for strategies that inclusively address the needs of all students involved in the programme, without undermining the overall goal of promoting girls’ education and health. Additionally, the result area included a research study on absenteeism and menstrual hygiene management, which was completed in 2022, however no evidence of the uptake of recommendations or usage of data has been identified through this evaluation.

Implementing Partner	Result identified in available reporting					Source
	Sub-outcome/output (as applicable)	Indicator phrasing	Target	Achieved	Achievement vs. Target	
MIET	Output: 1,300,858 girls in Intermediate Phase have increased knowledge and skills on menstrual health management through promotion of menstrual hygiene in schools	# of research studies conducted on MHM and schooling (desktop review)	1	1	100 %	MIET Programmatic check, July 2022
		# of research studies conducted on MHM and schooling (30 focus group discussions with learners)	30	10	33 %	
		Teachers trained on MHM	1000	254	25 %	
		# of IP learners who have increased knowledge and skill on SRHR and MHM	300	17226	5742 %	
	Output 3: 30 000 learners from 50 Q1-3 primary schools have improved child health, education and nutrition outcomes through system strengthening activities that address the capacity gaps of volunteer food handlers and empowerment of learners and schools on water, sanitation and hygiene	Availability of VFH training material (Desktop review)	1	1	100 %	
		Availability of VFH training material (VFH training materials)	1	1	100 %	
		# of VFH Supervisors with increased nutrition, hygiene and food safety and meal preparation knowledge	10	175	1750 %	
		# of VFH (2 per school) with increased nutrition, hygiene and food safety and meal preparation knowledge	75 %	0	0 %	
		# school staff trained on WASH	75 %	100 %	133 %	
		# group handwashing stations constructed	36	54	150 %	
		# learners supported and monitored on WASH	75 %	100 %	133 %	
Overall reporting by UNICEF	Research absenteeism and menstrual hygiene management conducted	Data collected on link between MHM and absenteeism	Data collected	The study was completed in 2022	Achieved	2023 Annual report
	Learners in senior phases have increased knowledge and skills on MHM	1,300,858 girls in senior phase have increased knowledge and skills on MHM	1 300 858	Direct: 867446. Indirect: 1277566	105 %	

Figure 9: Overview of available results reporting - Result area 3

Challenges to participation in programming

Multiple factors may have influenced the ability of the direct target population, i.e., student girls and boys, to effectively take part in the various programme interventions of the Undaunted programme. Survey respondents were provided the opportunity to list multiple options when responding to a question about the challenges they faced to take part in programme activities, illustrated in the below graph:

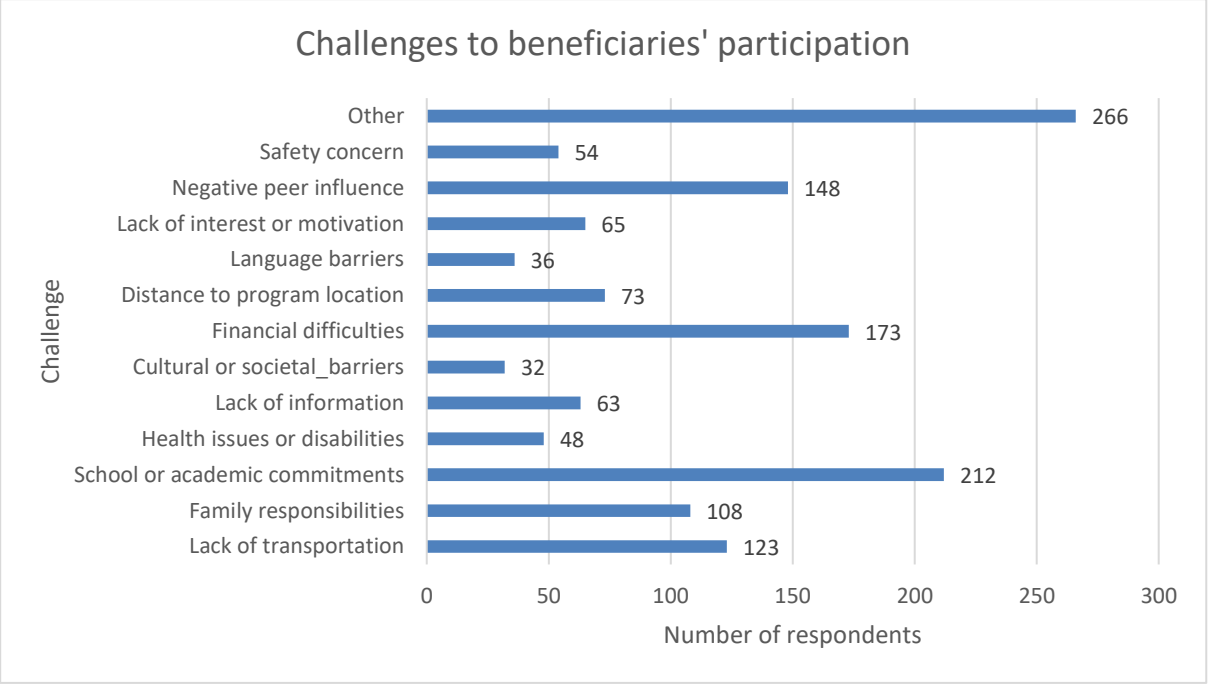

Figure 10: Self-reported challenges to participation in programme activities. N=775.

Figure 10 demonstrates a range of challenges which reportedly hindered the effective participation of beneficiaries in the programme activities. The challenges “other”, “school or academic commitments”, “financial difficulties”, “negative peer influence”, “lack of transportation” and “family responsibilities” all received more than 100 mentions by survey respondents.

Among the “other” responses, most followed up by stating “nothing” or “no challenges”. This means that the “other” category of responses includes respondents who experienced challenges which did not fit the other categories, and respondents who intended to reply that they did not have any challenges at all. The actual “other” challenges mentioned includes the following areas:

- Several participants mentioned experiencing social anxiety, which made it difficult for them to engage with others or participate fully in the programme.
- Lack of time due to other commitments or business was frequently cited as a reason for not being able to participate.
- Some participants mentioned that the stipend was insufficient to cover transportation costs, especially for those living far away.
- Participants reported being disturbed or influenced negatively by friends, which affected their ability to concentrate and participate.
- A few participants noted a lack of support from home or family, which impacted their engagement with the programme.
- Issues such as load shedding (power outages) and network problems were mentioned as barriers to participation, especially for virtual meetings.
- Some participants felt they already had the information being provided, which led to disinterest or lack of engagement.
- Logistical issues like fetching water in the morning were noted as challenge

The challenges highlight the real-world vulnerability of several of the key ToC assumptions. The ToC presupposes “supportive policy and regulatory environment,” “stakeholder motivation,” and “resource availability.” Where these are lacking or disrupted, the causal arrows from activities to outputs and intended outcomes are weakened, and interventions do not reach their full potential.

3.3.3 Partners demonstrated strong technical expertise and collaboration

The evaluation team has had access to and insights into the implementation from Agape/DBE, MIET and Afrika Tikkun. All partners have extensive experience with implementation and were selected as implementing partners in the project based on their merit and suitability for the project in question. The tri-partnership between UNICEF, DBE and Agape was highlighted as mutually reinforcing and beneficial, as the partners had clear roles in project implementation: UNICEF as the convening force and leading technical expert agency, Agape in the development of new curriculum using new technologies, and DBE in the implementation and uptake into national systems.

The ability of partners, including UNICEF, to adapt and effectively implement programmes when project assumptions change requires strengthening for future endeavours. The challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic highlight this need, as implementing project activities became exceedingly difficult. A significant issue was the lack of preparedness for alternative approaches, coupled with the assumption that conditions would soon return to normal, allowing for regular implementation. While pragmatism and a willingness to compromise were crucial for maintaining business continuity, essential programme components, such as job shadowing, were severely impacted during lockdowns.

As an example, Afrika Tikkun encountered substantial difficulties in recruiting firms to participate in the programme. Efforts to shift towards local implementation, which removed the requirement for job shadowing to occur in STEM-oriented businesses, diluted the overall impact of the activities conducted.

3.3.4 Generally high beneficiary satisfaction

To indicate satisfaction levels among the target population with the intervention, a survey question was posed to respondents. Results are presented below, disaggregated by gender to illustrate the gender breakdown, and per implementing partner.

Among the 775 survey respondents, satisfaction levels with the intervention were generally in the higher response brackets for all three implementing partners surveyed, with most respondents selecting the rating “satisfied” or “very satisfied across all result areas. The response “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” was only selected by participants who were part of activities implemented by MIET, but this accounts for only 1.4 % of respondents.

Female and male respondents were overall “very satisfied”, “satisfied” or “neutral” to the intervention. Fourteen percent of both female and male respondents stated they were “neutral” to the intervention in which they had taken part. 42% and 36% of female and male respondents respectively chose the alternative “satisfied”. Whereas 38% and 45% of female and male respondents respectively chose the alternative “very satisfied”.

Although the sample of respondents is not considered representative, the results indicate a large degree of satisfaction among those who were reached by the programme.

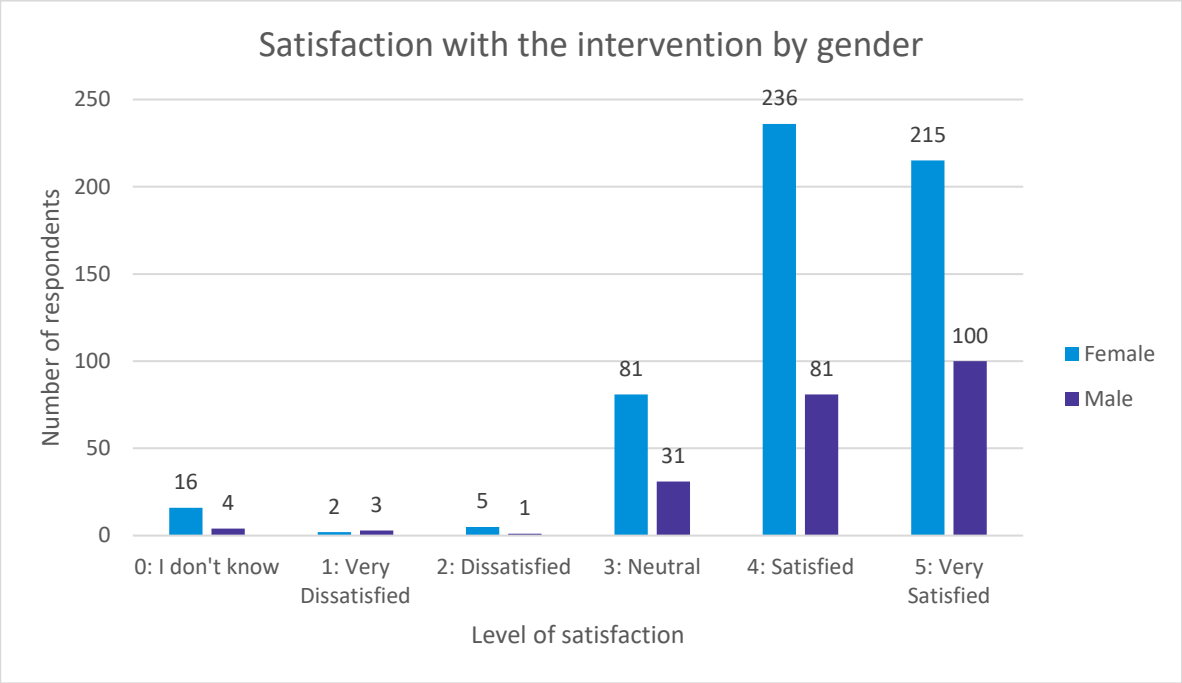

Figure 11: Survey results - satisfaction with the intervention disaggregated by gender. Total female respondents = 555. Total male respondents = 220.

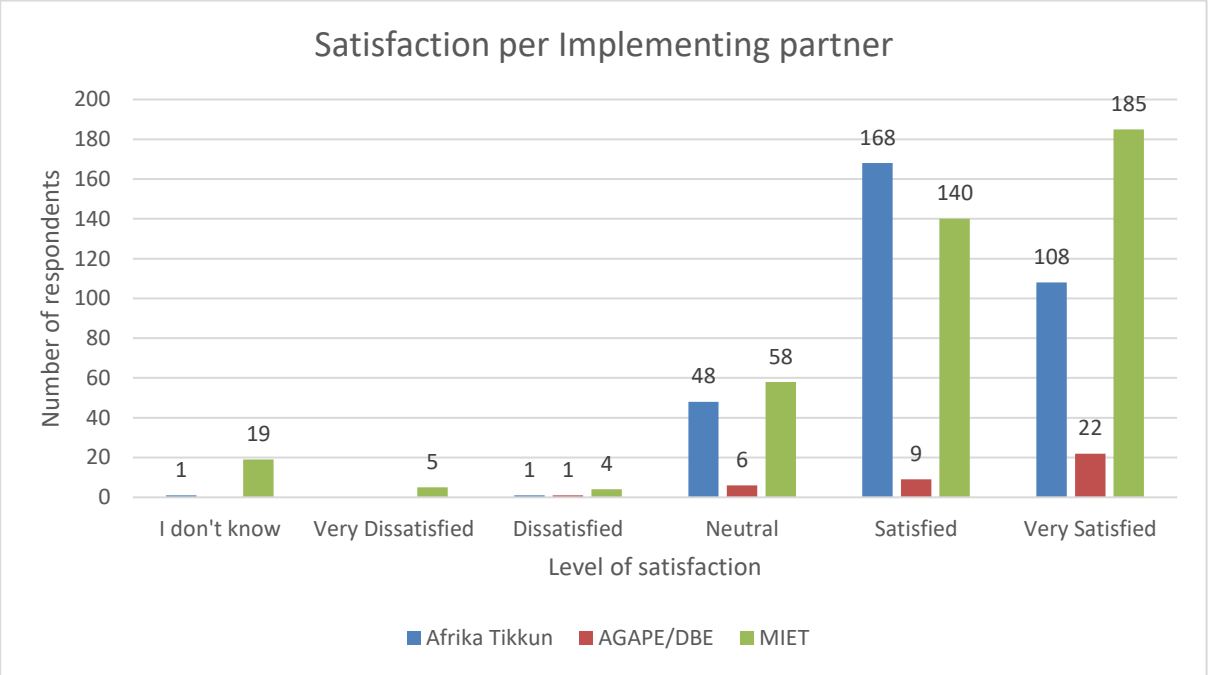

Figure 12: Survey results - satisfaction with the intervention per implementing partners. Respondents per IP: Afrika Tikkun=326; Agape/DBE= 38, MIET=411

3.3.5 Reflections on the ToC

Result Area 1 and Result Area 3 linked closely with ToC pathways that aimed to improve knowledge, confidence, and school participation. The programme achieved notable output-level successes, with many girls reporting increased understanding and greater comfort at school, while advocacy and improved facilities extended benefits to large groups. However, the link between these outputs and the deeper, sustained outcomes envisioned in the ToC, such as reduced absenteeism or transformed social norms, were both difficult to measure, and often weakened where key ToC assumptions did not hold, such as around community openness, active family support, and consistent infrastructure were not always present, limiting the achievement of broader change.

Although imparting knowledge and building awareness are necessary components of HIV awareness raising and MHM, these alone are insufficient to bring about lasting behaviour change. The ToC's effectiveness ultimately depends on a comprehensive, multi-level strategy which integrates information addresses underlying social and cultural norms across the socioecological spectrum, and provides the needed supplies, such as condoms. Without these structural and community-level supports, the translation of knowledge into meaningful, sustained outcomes remains incomplete.

Result Area 2 delivered encouragement, job-shadowing, and skill-building to target groups, successfully meeting many output indicators. Still, recurring challenges, such as inability to secure adequate STEM-specific placements and reluctance among communities or businesses, undercut the ToC's aspiration that girls would gain improved enrolment, retention, and transformative career pathways. Dilution of intended outcomes due to logistical and contextual realities demonstrates that certain ToC assumptions were only partially met.

While implemented activities often created the necessary foundation to achieve the intended pathway of change, gaps in vertical logic undermined the ability to robustly link outputs with deeper, sustained outcomes. The fragmented nature of partner monitoring systems and the limitations in consolidated, cumulative tracking across the whole results chain meant that the progression from participation to behaviour change, and ultimately to systemic impact, was not always evidence-based or linear.

Disruptions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessary shift to online modalities directly challenged ToC assumptions. UNICEF and its partners showed notable adaptability in pivoting to new delivery methods and responding to beneficiary needs, such as shifting content toward online safety and mental health when schools were closed. This adaptability to context deserves commendation, as it helped ensure some continuity of engagement during profoundly disruptive periods.

However, these shifts also meant that implementation occasionally diverged from core ToC pathways. Barriers such as limited digital access, competing family responsibilities, and weakened community engagement proved especially acute for rural and disadvantaged learners, diluting the expected linkages between knowledge transfer and actual behaviour change. Notably, awareness-raising was noted by beneficiaries to be repetitive. Changing social norms and achieving lasting agency, as part of the impact outlined in the ToC, will depend on deeper, multi-level support.

3.4 Impact: What difference does the intervention make?

The below section presents findings to one evaluation question:

1. How has the intervention generated or is expected to generate positive or negative, intended or unintended, and other higher-level effects on the target population(s)?

Key Findings

1. The programme generated, for the most part, self-reported positive effects for beneficiaries, spanning personal development (e.g., self-confidence, leadership), employability, and academic progress, with many participants crediting new skills and qualifications for employment, entrepreneurship, and further education opportunities.

2. Evidence for sustained, higher-level effects (e.g., reduced HIV rates or transformative gender-norm shifts) is lacking due to data limitations.

Evidence and triangulation*:*

Core evidence included the 2023 annual donor report, which provided cumulative results against the results framework for the entire implementation period, supplemented by implementing partner monitoring data, programme visit reports, and survey responses. Qualitative insights were gathered through key informant interviews. The evaluation also undertook a detailed mapping of reported outputs to the overall results framework. The reader is requested to review section 2.4 for limitations in the evidence

3.4.1 Anecdotal evidence shows positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries

Though the below section provides an assessment on how the intervention generated positive or negative intended effects, the evaluation team have not been able to systematically document or analyse unintended effects or higher-level effects. Please see section 2.4 on limitations in the data.

Looking at the generated intended impacts, the evaluation emphasizes the qualitative experience of the program beneficiaries. The perceptions of the target population were explored through KIIs, FGDs, and in in-depth response sections administered in the survey.

Table 8: Summarized survey responses – "Success stories" according to direct beneficiaries

Survey response summary: "*Could you share any success stories or positive outcomes that resulted from your participation in the programme?*"	
Positive and Intended	**Employment and job readiness:** • Many participants stated to have secured jobs after the programme, often using skills acquired such as CV writing and interview preparation. • Job shadowing and work readiness training helped participants understand workplace expectations and decide on career paths. • Certificates earned through the programme provided additional qualifications that, according to survey respondents, opened further opportunities for employment and education. **Technical skills development:** • Participants gained computer literacy, including proficiency in Microsoft Office, internet usage, and email communication. They emphasized this as relevant for their studies and work life. **Academic and personal growth:** • The programme reportedly helped improve school grades and facilitated easier navigation through university studies. • Presentation, communication, and public speaking skills were enhanced through debates and practical exercises.

	• Personal development plans and self-awareness exercises boosted self-confidence and self-esteem. The programme was stated to have fostered self-confidence, self-respect, and positive self-image, helping participants to interact better with peers and family. • Participants were encouraged to pursue their interests and were motivated to stay away from negative influences, which respondents emphasized as impactful. Participants reported increased motivation and discipline helped keeping them away from negative influences. **Health and safety awareness:** • Comprehensive sexual education led to more informed decision-making regarding prevention methods, according to some respondents. Participants learned about the importance of using protection to prevent STIs and teenage pregnancy, leading to a decrease in teenage pregnancy rates, according to multiple survey respondents. • Participants learned about HIV/AIDS prevention, respect, and how to handle difficult situations – life skills that some reported were typically not covered in school or at home. (see section on negative, unintended effects for a contrasting view) • The programme increased awareness about HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and GBV, equipping participants with knowledge to protect themselves. • Participants learned about hygiene and menstrual health management, enabling them to handle their menstrual cycles with confidence. Participants expressed appreciation for the focus on menstrual hygiene, noting that it helped them maintain cleanliness and dignity. **Strengthening community involvement, networking and entrepreneurship:** • Opportunities to connect with peers and mentors were valuable for building professional networks. • Participants reported to have shared their knowledge with peers and community members, advocating for healthy behaviours and prevention measures.
Positive and Unintended	**Interpersonal skills and psychological impacts:** • Individual respondents stated that the programme helped them overcome fears, among other of public speaking, deal with depression, and become more positive and independent. • Improved communication skills and teamwork were emphasized by respondents, allowing participants to make friends and socialize effectively. **Organizational skills and entrepreneurship:** • Respondents also emphasized that organizational and time management skills were improved, aiding both in professional settings and academic environments. • Some participants were inspired to start their own businesses, applying entrepreneurial skills learned during the programme.
Negative and Unintended	**No impact or success stories to share:** • The intervention did not yield to reported impacts for all participants surveyed. 40 of the 775 surveyed participants, which equates to 5%, stated variants of “nothing”, “none” and “N/A” when asked about personal success stories from their participation in the program. **Participants not understanding course content:** • One survey respondent noted that they did not understand anything that was taught. **Participants being demotivated by repetitious course content:** • Multiple respondents described course content on HIV awareness and prevention as repetitious and stated they already had been trained many times before on similar topics.

The self-reported answers in the survey summarized in Table 5, demonstrate that those who benefited from trainings and programming themselves, with notable exceptions, identify positive impacts in their lives and wider communities from the programme interventions. As stated in section 2.0 - Methodology for data collection and analysis, the survey sample is not representative of the total beneficiary population. However, it does indicate themes and perceived impact for individuals to which the programme may have contributed.

In addition to the survey, FGDs with programme beneficiaries further depicted impact experienced in the lives of the young persons involved. The young persons interviewed described changes observed relating to topics of community engagement, mental health support, and general awareness being raised. Regarding trainings on menstrual health specifically, this component was highlighted in one of the FGDs with respondents:

> *“It [the Program] is going to change the way society thinks about women’s menstrual cycle. Generally, in some religions, menstruation is viewed as being dirty, but the programme is helping our community and nation to stop the stigmatisation against menstruation. It will also help young people to know about teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.” (Respondent in FGD 3)*

The above participant quote emphasizes the perceived educational impact of menstrual health programming specifically, as it may help to change perceptions and in turn reduce stigmatization about menstruation.

On the individual level, many survey respondents provided further insights into how the program helped with their own employability and orientation on the job market. For instance, the below quotes from participants based in Gauteng illustrate how the program directly impacted their later employment :

> *“It helped me as I am now able to craft CV using those skills and present myself professionally. I am currently in a learnerships that I got through a CV I made in training” (Female, 23 years, Diepsloot, Gauteng)*

> *"Thanks to the programme I found a good paying job and recently got a promotion early this year at my company." (Male, 22 years, Hilbrow, Gauteng)*

> *“Thanks to the programme, I am currently employed in a field I didn't have enough qualifications for but because of the work readiness course we had it prepared me well enough for the job market” (Female, 22 years, Hilbrow, Gauteng)*

It is not clear based on the quotes whether the students pursued careers in the STEM field, as per the overall ToC of the programme, or if they are employed in other fields. However, the students credit the programme for landing their apprenticeships and jobs in the first place.

A number of survey respondents stated to have pursued ICT careers, and some reported to have progressed to higher education focusing on the ICT field, due to the skills the program helped them acquire. This student from Diepsloot, Gauteng provides such an example:

> *“I am currently studying information technology and it is only because i was exposed to computer literacy training” – (Female, 19 years, Diepsloot, Gauteng)*

Beyond the immediate impacts on some student’s career and academic trajectories, many students, especially those involved in the Life Orientation curriculum, highlighted personal development stemming from the programme.

> *"I overcame my fears; I was not able to speak in front of people, I was judgmental and I also used to have low self-esteem but now I am a better person." (Female, 18 years, Pretoria, Gauteng)*

The participant's increased confidence, reduced fear and judgmental attitudes, and boosted self-esteem demonstrate how the personal changes targeted by such programs can positively influence interpersonal relationships on a broader scale. However, positive stories/success stories were not experienced by all who took part in programming. Among other, the following was reported:

> *"I don't have any positive outcome. I tried to apply with the experience but I don't get a job." (Male, 23 years, Vaalwater, Limpopo)*

The above quote, from a young man who participated in job readiness programming but did not secure any employment afterward highlights a potential shortcoming of the intervention. It suggests that while the program may effectively have addressed supply-side needs by preparing youth for employment, it may have fallen short in creating demand for young workers in the job market.

Furthermore, in relation to specific activity implementation, a survey respondent shared an experience concerning a negative and unintended consequence of the implementation approach used:

> *"When alot of people opened some people used their stories against them which was not really nice" (Female, 23 years, Yeoville, Gauteng)*

The example above underscores the importance of creating safe spaces when delivering programs that require participants to share their personal stories, beliefs and experiences in plenary sessions and with their peers. Such disappointments in the program were echoed by some participants, who underlined that some of the content and topics covered in the program were redundant and repetitive from previous trainings, which is further elaborated under the relevance chapter.

3.4.2 Reflections on the ToC

The sections above demonstrate that several key outputs and immediate outcomes envisioned in the Theory of Change have been realised, particularly in areas such as increased knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention, improved menstrual health management, and enhanced job readiness and digital literacy among girls. Beneficiaries reported greater self-confidence, life skills, and access to career-building activities, which aligns with the ToC's pathway where targeted education and support should foster personal growth, academic engagement, and employability. Community-level progress was also mentioned, notably reduced stigma around menstruation and improved peer support, reflecting the ToC's aspirations for more inclusive and supportive school environments.

However, the evaluation also highlights that most of these impacts are concentrated at the output and intermediate outcome levels, rather than signifying the long-term shifts the ToC seeks, such as measurable improvements in school retention, reductions in HIV incidence, or significant increases in girls' participation in STEM careers. This could be attributed to multiple factors, such as limited mechanisms for systematic follow-up meaning that the evaluation could not reliably track participants over time to assess lasting change. The significant time lapse between programme completion and the evaluation also increased the difficulty of attributing observed outcomes to the intervention. Contributory challenges also weakened the causal links assumed in the ToC between increased awareness and sustained behavioral or systemic change.

Furthermore, the ToC's critical assumptions, such as community openness and ongoing policy support, were likely only partially fulfilled, limiting the reach and sustainability of higher-level impacts. While qualitative evidence suggests many beneficiaries experienced transformative personal development and practical gains, attribution to the programme for broader, systemic change remains limited due to the gaps in longitudinal data (see section 2.4).

3.5 Sustainability: Will the benefits last?

3.5.1 Integration with national systems supported sustainability

Informants described several ways in which the Undaunted Programme was designed and implemented to promote the continuation of benefits beyond the intervention period. Many noted that the programme was intentionally integrated into existing education structures, including embedding key components within the school curriculum and aligning activities with departmental policies. This integration allowed interventions such as HIV/AIDS education and menstrual health management to be delivered through the compulsory Life Orientation curriculum, leveraging established systems to support sustainability.

The following sections present the findings to six evaluation questions:

1. To what extent has the programme been designed and implemented in a way to ensure that benefits continue?
2. How can existing partner organizations contribute to the continuity of programme activities in programme areas?
3. In what ways could the programme be copied, upscaled or replicated at national level beyond the immediate programme areas?
4. Is the programme considered as delivering value for money for its present scope?
5. How has the program contributed to UNICEF's ability to champion equitable learning opportunities for girls in the STEM subjects?
6. How have these partnerships contributed to the perceived advancement of under privileged girls?

Key Findings

- Programme sustainability remains uncertain, though there is anecdotal evidence suggesting some potential for continued benefits
- Continuity faces practical barriers, including uneven access to free/subsidised sanitary products, persistent rural infrastructure challenges, and inequitable internet access for digital learning platforms.
- Partner organisations could play a key role in sustaining, scaling, or replicating the programme, given sufficient funding and engagement.
- National scale-up seems feasible due to strong alignment with existing government frameworks, but is mostly supported by qualitative evidence.

Evidence Source and Triangulation

Evidence draws from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys, as well as document review of programme design and COVID-19 adaptations. Programme monitoring data provided context. Quantitative data and longitudinal follow-up are limited, so conclusions should be interpreted as indicative, not definitive. The reader is requested to review section 2.4 for limitations in the evidence

Informants highlighted that capacity-building was a core element, with teachers, learner support agents, and peer leaders receiving training intended to ensure that knowledge and skills would remain within schools after the programme ended. Peer support models and clubs were frequently cited as drivers of sustained change, particularly in addressing issues like bullying, mental health, and teenage pregnancy, with perceived long-term impacts at both school and community levels.

However, some informants pointed out challenges to sustaining these benefits. There were concerns among informants that the Department of Basic Education ultimately prioritised core curriculum areas over life skills and related interventions. Life skills, while important, are not always seen as a priority in the broader education grant scheme, and there is reluctance within government structures to provide sustained support for these components.

Additionally, informants noted that while certain of the educators who were trained continued to apply new practices, others reverted to previous methods once external funding concluded, suggesting variability in the durability of programme effects. The training model, which often focused on a single educator per school, was described as insufficient for ensuring consistent support and comprehensive coverage, limiting the reach and long-term impact of the intervention. Reliance on programme-funded roles such as coordinators and facilitators was also seen as a risk to sustainability, as these positions could not be maintained after funding ended, leading to discontinuity and a loss of trust among learners and educators.

According to feedback received as part of the survey, peer educator workshops were seen to have empowered learners to assist their peers on issues such as teenage pregnancy, bullying, and substance abuse. Many participants expressed a commitment to continue raising awareness and offering guidance in their schools even after formal sessions had ended. However, it was also noted that, while the programme increased knowledge and skills, it did not always address critical practical needs, such as the provision of free or subsidized sanitary products, which remained a significant barrier to school attendance for many girls. This may impact the continued benefits of the programme post-implementation.

Informants described the programme's adaptability during the Covid-19 pandemic, noting the shift to online coaching and virtual job-shadowing. Digital platforms, such as the GBEM web application and Learning Passport, were seen as having potential to expand reach and reinforce learning, and to continue after the end of the Undaunted Programme.

The provision of mobile data to support rural youth's participation in online activities emerged as a sustainability concern. During the programme's pivot to online modalities, implementing partners and UNICEF allocated significant resources to purchasing data bundles so that beneficiaries, particularly those in rural areas, could access remote sessions. Reliance on externally funded data as a means of facilitating access to education and life skills activities is likely not a sustainable model, especially given the ongoing socioeconomic disparities affecting rural communities. Ad hoc distribution of data cannot replace the need for robust, inclusive delivery mechanisms.

3.5.2 Partner organisations have played an important role for sustainability

Key informants of this evaluation emphasised that partners could continue to provide training for teachers, learner support agents, and facilitators, given their experience in doing so. This is, however, reliant on funding.

Survey input and parent feedback suggest that greater involvement of families in programme activities, such as parent meetings and open discussions about puberty, SRHR, and MHH, helps reinforce positive behaviours at home and builds a supportive environment for girls. In addition, partners can lead advocacy campaigns and community engagement efforts to overcome resistance, particularly in sensitive areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and menstrual health management. These efforts are vital for shifting attitudes and building supportive environments for learners.

Key informants also noted that partners can facilitate critical buy-in from the Department of Basic Education and local stakeholders, which is essential for programme longevity. By ensuring that programmes are included in annual school calendars and that principals and teachers are mandated to participate, partners help solidify the programme's place within the school system.

On the STEM activities, participants consistently reported that partnerships between schools, government departments, NGOs, and community organizations contributed directly to improved access to quality education, skills development, and empowerment opportunities for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, partnerships with the Department of Social Development and MIET Africa were credited with providing essential materials such as toiletries and sanitary pads to underprivileged girls—addressing a critical barrier to school attendance and personal dignity. These material contributions were frequently cited as having a tangible positive impact on girls' ability to manage menstrual health, reduce absenteeism, and participate more fully in school life.

Further, focus group respondents highlighted that partner organizations supported the delivery of educational and health programmes tailored to the needs of girls in both urban and rural settings, including those living with disabilities. These partnerships enabled the implementation of inclusive education initiatives, promoted gender equality, and provided targeted support for vulnerable learners. In addition, the involvement of local stakeholders and community-based organizations was seen as vital for ensuring that programme activities were contextually relevant, sustainable, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by each community.

Partnerships also facilitated the delivery of knowledge and skills training in areas such as menstrual health hygiene, self-confidence, and life skills, which were reported to have lasting effects on girls' self-esteem and ability to advocate for themselves and others. In some cases, partnerships enabled the provision of psychosocial support and the creation of safe spaces for girls to discuss sensitive topics, further contributing to their empowerment and well-being.

Moreover, focus group participants noted that partnerships extended the reach of the programme by engaging additional stakeholders, such as the Department of Health and the South African Police Service, in campaigns on HIV/AIDS prevention, substance abuse, and gender-based violence. This collaborative approach was viewed as strengthening the programme's impact and ensuring that a broader range of social issues affecting underprivileged girls were addressed holistically.

Partnerships were widely perceived by beneficiaries as instrumental in advancing the interests of underprivileged girls. They provided essential resources, enabled inclusive and contextually relevant programming, supported the development of critical life skills, and fostered a supportive environment for girls' empowerment and continued educational participation. The collective efforts of these partners were seen as key to breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for girls who might otherwise be left behind.

3.5.3 The programme's integration into existing government systems provide a foundation for national replication

The programme's integration with existing government frameworks, such as the DBE's Care and Support for Teaching and Learning and the Life Orientation curriculum, provides a blueprint for embedding life skills, HIV/AIDS prevention, MHM, and STEM education into the national education system. Several of the key informants of this evaluation have noted that this integration was key to implementation.

The hybrid delivery model introduced primarily during the Covid-19 pandemic, could provide an opportunity for scaling up. The use of digital platforms like the GBEM web application and the Learning Passport allows for flexible, high-quality learning that can reach a large number of learners across diverse geographies. These platforms can be expanded nationally, provided that digital access and infrastructure are improved to underprivileged areas.

The programme's participatory and peer education methodologies, which have equipped learners to become leaders and agents of change in their schools and communities, can be replicated and scaled up to more schools, and was noted by participants as being an important part of the effectiveness of the programme.

The programme's approach to MHM, particularly in efforts in integrating menstrual health education into schools, distributing both disposable and washable sanitary products, and engaging parents and communities, could be expanded through national campaigns and partnerships with local and international NGOs, government, and the private sector.

3.5.4 Available data not suitable for value for money assessments

As the documentation of the Undaunted programme does not include comprehensive, verified data on the actual number of beneficiaries reached or the precise outputs achieved, it is not possible to calculate or compare value for money in a rigorous or quantitative sense. Making any definitive statement on value for money inherently limited.

However, based on the effectiveness section above, the Undaunted Programme is considered to likely have delivered value for money within its present scope. The programme's design strategically leveraged existing education structures to maximize reach and sustainability without incurring excessive new costs. Capacity-building efforts focused on teachers, learner support agents, and peer leaders were intended to ensure that skills and knowledge would remain within schools, reducing the need for future external investment.

Survey responses and qualitative data indicated that beneficiaries valued the programme's activities, reporting increased knowledge, empowerment, and practical benefits such as reduced absenteeism and improved confidence.

However, this evaluation also identified some limitations that affect value for money. The reliance on funding for additional coordinators and facilitators, as well as the limited reach of educator training (often only one educator per school), constrained the programme's ability to achieve broader and more sustained impact without further investment. Fragmentation across result areas and challenges in post-programme follow-up also limited efficiency.

3.5.5 The interventions likely strengthened UNICEF's capacity to champion equitable STEM learning

The Undaunted Programme has likely contributed to UNICEF's ability to champion equitable learning opportunities for girls in STEM subjects, through the strategic integration of STEM education into the national curriculum, supporting targeted teacher training, and leveraging digital platforms to broaden access. Informants noted that these efforts enabled girls from disadvantaged backgrounds—including those in rural and under-resourced communities—to access high-quality STEM education and experiences that were previously unavailable or inaccessible.

Survey feedback and qualitative data indicate that girls not only gained exposure to coding and robotics but also developed greater confidence and interest in pursuing STEM careers. Many beneficiaries reported that their participation in STEM activities increased their motivation to engage with science and technology subjects, challenging traditional gender norms and opening pathways to future educational and career opportunities. Teachers highlighted that the training they received empowered them to become STEM champions within their schools, further embedding these subjects into daily learning and helping to break down persistent gender stereotypes.

The programme's approach also fostered partnerships with government agencies, private sector companies, and local organizations, which were instrumental in providing job-shadowing opportunities, mentorship, and resources for girls interested in STEM. These partnerships not only expanded the scope and quality of STEM programming but also enhanced UNICEF's credibility and capacity to advocate for systemic change in girls' education. The development and piloting of a new STEM curriculum under the Undaunted Programme, now positioned for national scale-up, further demonstrates the potential for sustainable, large-scale impact.

3.5.7 Reflections on the ToC

The Undaunted Programme's contribution to UNICEF's ability to champion equitable learning opportunities for girls in STEM is well reflected in its Theory of Change pathways. According to the ToC, the programme's STEM activities—such as supporting in-school coaching, embedding STEM components in the national curriculum, and establishing partnerships with private sector companies for job-shadowing—were designed as core "IF (Activities)" and "AND IF" steps that should lead to increased confidence, skills, and ambition in STEM among girls ("THEN" greater STEM interest, self-efficacy, and participation). The programme's reported results provide evidence that these ToC outputs materialized for many beneficiaries. Furthermore, the creation of partnerships enabled wider systemic change, aligning with the ToC assumption that sustainable impact hinges on institutional integration and broad stakeholder collaboration. However, the findings also reinforce the importance of certain ToC assumptions: the need for enabling environments, ongoing resource support, and the challenge of extending access and relevance to the most marginalized, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. Where enabling conditions held, the causal link from STEM exposure (activity/output) to changed aspirations and opportunities (outcome/impact) was largely confirmed.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Undaunted Programme set out to tackle some of South Africa's most persistent and gendered barriers in education, focusing on HIV/AIDS awareness, STEM education, and menstrual health management for adolescent girls. Over five years, it reached a broad spectrum of beneficiaries, embedding interventions within school systems and leveraging government partnerships to maximize reach and sustainability.

The evaluation found that the Undaunted Programme was relevant to the needs of adolescent girls in South Africa, particularly those facing overlapping vulnerabilities due to poverty, rural location, and disability. Its three focus areas directly addressed critical gendered barriers to educational participation and achievement. The design and implementation were closely aligned with national policy priorities, including the Constitution, the National Development Plan 2030, and sectoral strategies for gender equality, adolescent health, and education. Beneficiaries affirmed the value of key interventions, particularly menstrual hygiene management and HIV prevention activities, noting improvements in knowledge, self-confidence, and practical skills. Integration into the compulsory Life Orientation curriculum further reinforced the programme's relevance by embedding content within an existing national delivery platform.

The programme was largely aligned with government policy frameworks and UNICEF's Country Programme objectives, leveraging national systems such as the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning model. Partnerships with the Department of Basic Education and other government entities enhanced policy alignment and facilitated curriculum integration. However, coherence between implementing partners could have been strengthened. Activities were often delivered in isolation, with limited cross-learning or synergy, partly due to fragmented design and siloed monitoring systems.

Nevertheless, the absence of a unified results framework, clear annual targets, baseline data, and outcome-level indicators significantly constrained the assessment of results against objectives. While self-reported gains in knowledge, confidence, and skills were substantial, evidence of sustained behavioural change was inconsistent. Structural and socio-cultural barriers, including poverty, entrenched gender norms, and digital divides, limited the translation of awareness into sustained action. The shift to digital delivery during COVID-19 demonstrated adaptability but also reduced reach and effectiveness for marginalised groups.

The programme made strategic use of existing government structures, school platforms, and local implementing partners, which likely improved cost efficiency and reach. Co-financing arrangements and leveraging of departmental systems reduced duplication and resource costs. However, delayed implementation, which was exacerbated by pandemic-related disruptions but also pre-existing administrative bottlenecks,resulted in inefficiencies and diluted the intensity of some interventions. Fragmented implementation across partners also limited opportunities for scale economies and joint delivery.

There is qualitative evidence of positive personal and community-level impacts, including increased confidence, improved menstrual hygiene management, heightened awareness of gender-based violence, and, in some cases, enhanced employability and STEM engagement. However, due to a lack of longitudinal data, contribution to higher-level impacts, for example increased school retention, reduced adolescent pregnancy, or reduced HIV prevalence, cannot be robustly demonstrated. Reported impacts appear strongest at immediate and intermediate outcome levels rather than at the final impact level envisioned in the ToC.

The programme's integration into DBE curricula and the training of educators and learner support agents created foundations for sustainability. Peer networks and community engagement further strengthened local ownership. Nonetheless, sustainability was undermined by reliance on donor funding, training of only one educator per school in many cases, and the absence of secure local budget allocations. Additionally, the provision of mobile data to support rural youth's participation in online activities emerged as a sustainability concern. Variability in continued application of training after programme closure suggests uneven institutional buy-in. Digital platforms piloted during the pandemic hold potential for ongoing use, but their effectiveness will depend on equitable access to connectivity and devices.

Future programming must move toward deeper institutionalisation: embedding girls' empowerment activities within national curricula, teacher training, and school governance, investing in robust, integrated monitoring and evaluation frameworks of implementations. Addressing persistent structural barriers, such as digital access, resource gaps, and community engagement, as well as long-term socal norm change, is critical to ensuring that interventions reach and benefit the most marginalized girls.

4.1 Lessons Learned

The evaluation of the Undaunted Programme demonstrates that strong policy alignment and integration into existing government systems are key enablers of relevance, legitimacy, and potential scalability, but these alone are not sufficient to guarantee sustainable results. Embedding activities into the Life Orientation curriculum and DBE frameworks helped maintain delivery during disruptions, yet sustainability requires deeper institutionalisation, including integration into teacher training systems, inclusion in school governance, and securing provincial budget lines. The programme's experience also highlights that information dissemination, while appreciated, is insufficient to drive behavioural change in contexts where socio-economic constraints, entrenched gender norms, and lack of resources shape daily decisions. Greater impact is achieved when knowledge transfer is paired with mentorship, psychosocial support, peer leadership structures, and deliberate community engagement strategies that address both agency and the social environment. Another major lesson is the critical role of robust and harmonised monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems from the outset of project development. The absence of a unified results framework, clear baselines, and harmonised partner reporting hindered the ability to measure progress, assess value for money, or credibly demonstrate higher-level outcomes such as reduced HIV infection rates or increased STEM participation. For multi-partner, multi-sector programmes, early agreement on a common MEL framework, with behavioural and systemic change indicators, is essential for accountability and adaptive management.

The evaluation found that while the primary focus was on empowering girls through education and resources. Boys were included in sessions in schools, where issues such as MHM were included in classroom curriculum. Evidence underscores the importance of designing empowerment programmes that engage boys and men as allies, not only to foster more supportive school environments but also to reduce stigma, build empathy, and promote gender equality holistically. Future programming should intentionally integrate boys and male teachers into discussions around menstrual health and broader gender themes, ensuring that all students understand and support girls' rights, wellbeing, and participation.

Finally, the programme's COVID-19 adaptations showed both the promise and limits of hybrid/digital delivery models: while they offered continuity, they also exposed deep structural access barriers, such as digital divides, transport constraints, and the affordability of menstrual products, that must be addressed as core programme components if future interventions are to reach and benefit the most marginalised girls.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation, and given that the Undaunted Programme's implementation period has ended, the following recommendations have been derived for future implementation of similar programmes by UNICEF in South Africa. The below recommendations are structured according the the OECD-DAC criteria. Key rights holders and duty bearers were not included in the development of recommendations, and as such they would benefit from their review and validation.

Relevance

Recommendation 1: Deepen and operationalise integration with government systems for national scale-up

Priority: High – critical to long-term impact and national scalability

Timeframe: Immediate – integrate into 2025–2026 planning cycles and new CPD

Responsibility: UNICEF South Africa

Background: The evaluation found that integration into DBE frameworks such as the Life Orientation curriculum and the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning model was a key driver of sustainability and scalability (Section 3.5.3). This institutional anchoring allowed certain components (for example, MHM lessons, GBEM peer-support clubs, and Life Skills content) to continue even after donor-funded activities ended, and helped them withstand disruptions such as COVID-19 school closures. Stakeholders also confirmed that policy alignment with instruments such as the Policy on Learner Pregnancy, Integrated School Health Policy, and Sanitary Dignity Policy Framework gave the programme legitimacy, facilitated provincial acceptance, and enabled incorporation into school timetables (Section 3.5.2). Where these conditions were in place, activities reached more disadvantaged girls, continuity was stronger, and reliance on external facilitators was reduced. In contrast, areas without these institutional linkages saw greater drop-off after project support ended.

Description: UNICEF should work with DBE to formalise and standardise the integration of girls' empowerment content across relevant DBE systems, namely:

- Embed all three result area topics into Life Orientation lesson plans, teacher resource packs, and provincial subject advisors' support materials.
- Institutionalise GBEM peer-support and leadership structures into official school governance (e.g., Representative Councils of Learners) so they operate as sustained in-school clubs beyond project cycles.
- Integrate MHM content and provision guidance into CSTL WASH standards, making menstrual-friendly facilities and supply chains part of provincial Education Infrastructure Plans.
- Ensure STEM elements — especially coding, robotics, and digital literacy — are embedded into DBE's approved youth skills pathways, and directly linked to job-shadowing agreements with vetted STEM employers to avoid dilution into non-STEM fields.
- Agree on joint DBE–UNICEF provincial action plans with annual targets, budgeting for curriculum delivery, educator capacity-building, and monitoring via EMIS to track participation and retention of girls in these interventions.

Integration should also include policy-to-practice translation, as this evaluation has shown that aligning with sectoral frameworks is not enough unless provincial rollout plans, school improvement plans, and teacher appraisal systems explicitly reference and resource these components. The evaluation found that early engagement with provincial planners and school governing bodies will help secure timetabling, prevent content repetition fatigue, and ensure equitable delivery to rural and under-resourced schools.

Effectiveness

Recommendation 2: Work to remove structural barriers to participation

Priority: Medium–High

Timeframe: Short term – within 12 months

Responsibility: UNICEF SA, DBE, Provincial Departments, IPs

Background: The evaluation found that barriers, including transport costs, poor digital connectivity, and the affordability of menstrual products, were among the most frequently cited challenges to participation (Sections 3.2 and 3.3.2). Qualitative evidence from FGDs and KIIs reinforces that these constraints were particularly acute for girls in rural and low-income contexts, where interventions often failed to reach those most in need. Implementing partners reported cases where girls withdrew from STEM coaching, job shadowing, or life-skills sessions solely because they could not afford sanitary pads, travel fares, or mobile data. In some rural schools, distance to job-shadowing placements was a prohibitive factor; in others, intermittent electricity and weak network coverage meant digital content could not be accessed at all. These barriers undermine equity and contravene the commitment to a "leave no one behind" approach.

Description: Future iterations of this programming should make removal of structural barriers a built-in component rather than an optional add-on. This could entail:

- Establish agreements with suppliers and local social enterprises for the regular, discreet distribution of free or subsidised sanitary pads (including washable/reusable options where culturally and logistically appropriate). Draw on the Sanitary Dignity Programme framework and lessons from Undaunted's MHM component, which showed that consistent supply improved attendance and reduced stigma.
- Integrate menstrual-friendly toilet facilities, water supply, and disposal systems in all programme schools into provincial Education Infrastructure Plans, ensuring facilities are maintained to avoid the rapid decline noted in some Undaunted schools one year post-installation.
- Ensure strategic engagement of boys in girls empowerment activities.
- Pilot low-tech/offline learning methods in areas with persistent connectivity challenges.
- For activities requiring travel (e.g., STEM job shadowing, competitions, inter-school workshops), provide transport stipends or organise group travel from central pick-up points. The evaluation found that learners in remote schools, especially girls, were often excluded from opportunities because their families could not cover transport costs.
- At enrolment, capture individual learner barrier profiles (e.g., WASH challenges, distance, device access), and use these to plan tailored support packages. Monitor the uptake and impact of interventions, using simple feedback tools (e.g., peer leader attendance logs cross-referenced with barrier data) to assess whether participation gaps are closing.

Efficiency

Recommendation 4: Improve Financial Transparency and Cost Tracking

Priority: Medium

Timeframe: Immediate (for new projects)

Responsibility: UNICEF

Background: The available financial data and reporting provided to the evaluation team was not sufficient to do a thorough assessment of cost and expenditure. Financial data on costs are not linked to specific outcome objectives/targets, which makes comparisons of outcomes and costs impossible.

Description: For future programs, UNICEF should improve the transparency of financial data to allow external evaluators conduct analysis on efficiency and cost-effectiveness of programs. Financial data should be structured to more closely resemble the program objectives and outcomes, allowing to match spending against objectives. UNICEF should also ensure financial data is collected from implementing partners. With improved reporting in the future, UNICEF or external consultants should conduct further cost-effectiveness analyses of programs in order to improve future programming. The efficiency of development programming is important to ensure that limited budgets are spent on effective and efficient activities. Improved financial reporting in donor reports would also give donors the opportunity to assess cost-related issues and delays throughout implementation of programs.

Impact

Recommendation 4: Establish a unified results framework and strengthen monitoring and evaluation

Priority: High – essential for behaviour change and measurable outcomes

Timeframe: Design stage – before next programme implementation begins

Responsibility: UNICEF programme managers and IPs

Background: The evaluation found that fragmented, partner-specific reporting and the predominance of "reach" indicators (e.g., number of girls trained) prevented the programme from tracking behavioural change or linking outputs to intermediate and long-term outcomes (Section 3.3.1). These weaknesses were magnified by the lack of baseline assessments (Section 2.4), which meant there was no reference point against which to measure progress. While several implementing partners met or exceeded their own internal targets, these were not always aligned to a common framework, which limited the ability to aggregate results, assess cost-effectiveness (Section 3.2.3), or demonstrate contribution to key outcomes such as retention, STEM uptake, or reduced SRHR vulnerabilities. By tailoring the M&E framework to multi-partner delivery with clear accountability at both partner and aggregate programme level, UNICEF will be able to demonstrate not just reach, but meaningful behavioural, educational, health, and system changes attributable to the intervention.

Description: Future multi-partner based interventions, such as a successor to the Undaunted Programme, should adopt a harmonised, programme-wide M&E framework. The framework should:

- Include SMART, context-specific indicators for each result area that go beyond participation counts, such as:
  - Behavioural change, for example percentage of girls reporting ability to negotiate safe sexual practices; percentage demonstrating improved menstrual health management practices; changes in self-reported leadership/agency scores.
  - Education outcomes, for example school retention and completion rates of participating girls; STEM subject enrolment and pass rates disaggregated by gender, location, and disability.
  - Health outcomes, for example adolescent pregnancy rates and HIV incidence among programme participants (tracked where feasible via anonymised school/health data).
  - System-level change, for example number/% of schools adopting and sustaining GBEM clubs; integration of MHM/WASH standards into School Improvement Plans.
- Mandate aligned data collection tools across all partners to reduce variability, with a minimum core data set and simple aggregation protocols for national reporting.
- Integrate with DBE EMIS and school-level reporting systems wherever possible, so that data can be periodically cross-checked, reducing duplication and enhancing government ownership.
- Start with baseline and follow-up data collection for all key indicators, ensuring partner capacity for consistent data capture is in place before rollout.
- Ensure targeted studies or needs assessment before programme design to ensure relevance, impact, and sustainability.

- Build in cyclical review points to inform course corrections
- Consider opportunities to introduce participatory monitoring elements, such as peer-educator-led data diaries or learner feedback cards, to capture real-time perspectives on content relevance, delivery quality, and perceived change.
- Use digital and low-tech modalities for data collection: for rural schools with limited connectivity, offline survey apps, SMS-based reporting, or simple paper forms can ensure consistent coverage without excluding the most marginalised.

Sustainability

Recommendation 5: Expand capacity and institutional anchoring for sustainability

Priority: High – essential for post-programme continuity

Timeframe: : Medium term – begin within 12 months of implementation

Responsibility: UNICEF SA, Implementing Partners, DBE, School Management Teams

Background: The evaluation found that while many beneficiaries self-reported positive personal and academic changes (Section 3.4), there was no robust evidence on higher-order impacts such as reduced HIV rates or increased STEM parity, because indicators and reporting focused on reach rather than change. Strengthening impact monitoring will also improve attribution and inform adaptive management. This evaluationd (section 3.5.2) shows that where school leadership, parents, and community champions were engaged, implementation was more consistent and advocacy for girls' education had greater reach. The evaluation found that while partnerships contributed positively to programme delivery (section 3.5.2), greater coherence, joint planning, and more systematic sharing of lessons and monitoring data would support better alignment and synergies across stakeholders.

Description: To ensure future school-based adolescent girls' empowerment programmes can endure beyond donor cycles, UNICEF and DBE should shift from a "single champion" model to a multi-layered institutional anchoring strategy. This would involve:

- Training multiple educators or LSAs per school per thematic area to ensure redundancy and peer support in delivery.
- Formal integration of peer-education clubs like GBEM into school governance structures. This ensures that peer-to-peer leadership in gender equality, menstrual health, and STEM is officially recognised, resourced, and timetabled, rather than relying on informal goodwill.
- Structured parent and community engagement mechanisms such as community dialogues on SRHR, MHM, and STEM, led jointly by trained educators, peer leaders, and School Governing Body members. In Undaunted schools where parents were mobilised early, the evaluation found smoother implementation and stronger advocacy for girls' attendance and participation.
- Establishing clear channels for regular dialogue, shared accountability, and collective problem-solving between partners to ensure that best practices are disseminated, challenges are addressed collaboratively, and programme objectives are pursued in a more unified and effective manner.
- Local government budget advocacy supporting DBE district offices and principals to work with municipal structures to secure funding lines for menstrual products, small STEM project kits, or club facilitation costs. Where local procurement is feasible (e.g., pads from local social enterprises), this can also strengthen local economies (see previous recommendations).
- Partnerships with health services and local specialists to maintain periodic refresher training, mentoring visits, and resource replenishments after donor exit, especially in rural schools.

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