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New evidence shows that the work of United Nations agencies is effective

Collaborative research involving University of Cape Town (UCT) researchers shows how key services in lower- and middle-income countries can contribute to reaching multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), even among high-risk children and adolescents.

The study – led by Oxford University in collaboration with UCT, the University of the Witwatersrand, University College London and the United Nations Development Programme – is the first to test the United Nations' concept of 'accelerators': provisions that can improve the lives of vulnerable populations in not only one SDG area, but many.

It finds clear evidence for these, even amongst an exceptionally high-risk group: adolescents living with HIV in South Africa. The study goes further to find that simple combinations of accelerators – such as parenting support, cash transfers and safe schools – result in an even greater impact.

"This new evidence is a step forward in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals," says Professor Lucie Cluver, a principal investigator at Oxford University and honorary professor at UCT's Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, who led the study. "Even for one of Africa's most vulnerable groups – adolescents living with HIV and AIDS – the right combinations of programmes can help.

"By providing social welfare grants, safe schools and supportive parenting for these highest-risk teens, we can make substantial positive impacts across health, education, gender equality and violence prevention."

The paper, published in [The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health](#), is part of a special issue on adolescent health to coincide with the International Paediatric Association Congress. This research is at the core of the work of the Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub, a research initiative funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), a funding scheme of United Kingdom (UK) Research and Innovation. The Hub is a partnership between African and UK universities, and international agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).

"We are really looking forward to extending this analysis conceptually and methodologically to the Hub's work led by our team at UCT," says Dr Elona Toska, a lead investigator of the study and UCT lead academic for the Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub.

"Leading social scientists will work closely with a cohort of early career researchers at UCT and partner institutions to capitalise on existing datasets by exploring new possible accelerators and accelerator synergies across a dozen African countries."

UCT is involved in [two of the GCRF hubs](#).



Sinovuyo Teen Parenting programme: Child abuse prevention programme activities delivered over 14 sessions in late 2015 to caregivers and teens

Photo: Clowns Without Borders South Africa, 2015

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