EXPERIENCES OF YOUTHS PARTICIPATING IN COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION AND HIV PREVENTION PROGRAMME IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS OF GAUTENG PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY DESIGN

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIAL WORK

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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

SUPERVISOR: PROF. PIUS T. TANGA

MARCH 2023
DECLARATIONS

Declaration on previous submission

I, Enock Zibengwa, student number 201813741 declare that this Thesis titled “Experiences of youths participating in combination social protection programme and HIV prevention in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa: A collective case study design”, submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Fort Hare, is my own work and has never been submitted for any other degree at this university or any other university.

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Signature:

Date: 31 March 2023
DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my wife, Nomah Zibengwa, who always reminds me that “God is faithful, and dreams always come true”. To my mother, Beatrice Zibengwa, whose prayers have always been my greatest source of inspiration, this is also for you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is a result of a remarkable collaborative endeavour involving many people who have contributed their time, skills, and expertise to take it from idea to fruition.

- Professor Pius Tanga, I am gratefully appreciative of the invaluable guidance and critical support throughout the journey. I surely could have not chosen a better supervisor.

- I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, the financial assistance received during my studies from the Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre of the University of Fort Hare.

- A special thank you to the NGOs and all the hardworking staff members for willingly co-operating and assisting me in this study. I also pay special tribute to the youths and all other study participants, for participating in the study and sharing their experiences and knowledge with me, at no cost.

- My sincere thanks go to my research assistant, Babbot Muchanyerei, who did a sterling job of assisting me with data gathering, I am grateful for the time we worked together.

- Lastly, my fond gratitude goes to my family, Tisha, Terrence and Nomah for their forbearance and support throughout the study. Thank you very much for always being there for me - your love and understanding are always amazing.
ABSTRACT

South Africa continues to experience unacceptably high Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) incidence rates among youths aged 15 to 24 years. Remarkably, this is despite the numerous youth HIV prevention programmes that have been implemented in the country. Unfortunately, the programmes have not significantly curbed the spread of HIV due to the partial and fragmented nature of their implementation. The programmes are also observed to be weak in addressing complex economic factors recognised as important structural drivers for vulnerabilities that put youths at risk of HIV infection. To address this challenge, there is increased adoption and implementation of the Combination Social Protection (introduced in this research as the CSP) by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The CSP is a youth empowerment programming strategy whose critical foundations are entrenched in combining economic strengthening interventions and HIV prevention education. CSP could provide youths with a set of indispensable life skills that enhance their competencies and agency to make informed and effective decisions regarding their health and economic lives.

Despite its growing traction, little is known regarding links between the CSP and its abilities to improve HIV prevention outcomes for youths. Given the paucity of research, this study aimed to explore the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme, with a particular focus on the resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

This study employed a collective case study design, within the qualitative approach, and was exploratory. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with 30 youths from six established NGOs in the City of Johannesburg (CoJ). Qualitative thematic analysis was employed as a data analysis strategy. Focus groups were separately conducted with six practitioners from the same six NGOs, and five officials from the Department of Social Development (DSD). Both phases of data collection were guided by interview themes, which were aligned with the objectives of the study.

The findings of the study point to the fact that the CSP’s innovative and holistic approach offered numerous transformative and empowering benefits to youths. It
equipped them with basic informational resources, capabilities, and social assets to safeguard their health and aid their economic advancement. The programme’s mixed-gender sessions provided space, freedom, and support for youths to engage on issues of gender, differential access to health and socio-economic opportunities. Another major finding of the study was that improvement of economic aptitude (brought about by financial literacy education), employability, and entrepreneurship training stirred a sense of agency and purposefulness among youths, which in turn, prompted them to be more focused on achieving long-term objectives instead of indulging in risky sexual practices. Conversely, findings revealed that the programme had limited opportunities and did not create an adequate supportive environment for youths to develop successful entrepreneurial or income-generating projects. There was also no structure to assist youths to access apprenticeship and employment markets. The study specifically recognised that the programme’s efforts to develop youths’ entrepreneurship and employability capabilities were curtailed by a lack of mentorship and access to financial capital for start-up costs.

With these findings in mind, recommendations are made for the creation of an enabling environment by purposefully engaging youths, establishing collaborative relations with communities, and building networks with businesses and financial institutions that can help youths with capital, mentorship, and linkages to internship and wage-employment. Such collaborations could be fundamental in unravelling the impact of the programme on building livelihoods and reducing HIV among youths. Hence, this study proposes a model with strategies to support the successful implementation of economic strengthening interventions for youths.

**Keywords:** Youth, Combination Social Protection, Economic strengthening, HIV prevention, Risk, Vulnerability, Empowerment, Agency
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<td>African Capacity Building Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGYW</td>
<td>Adolescent Girls and Young Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
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<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>ART</td>
<td>Anti-Retroviral Therapy</td>
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<td>ASPIRES</td>
<td>Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening</td>
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<td>CARE</td>
<td>Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere</td>
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<td>RSA</td>
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<td>HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Surveys</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general overview of the study. It describes the problem statement and rationale for the study. Research questions, aims, and objectives of the study are stated, and a brief overview of the research methodology used is also provided. This chapter further demonstrates the significance of the study, namely how the research contributes to society at large, in addition to how it can be used for policy implementation. The theoretical framework that guided the research is also given. The key concepts of the study are defined, and the chapter subsequently closes with a brief outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to many sources, such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2021), South Africa has the biggest Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) pandemic in the world. The HSRC (2021) notes that prevalence rates are much higher in youths aged 15 to 24 years, particularly amongst females, where the number of new infections is estimated to be three to four times that of their male counterparts. It is currently postulated that poverty, unemployment, inequalities, and gender disparities increasingly place youths from resource-constrained-settings at the most disadvantage for higher exposure to HIV through the adoption of economically driven risky behaviours (Mabaso et al., 2021; United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2021b). Additionally, it is observed that the number of youths who have sufficient and correct knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention remains very low, thus the rapid spread of the virus in the age group (Mabaso et al., 2021).

Despite some commendable development and progress that has been made in advancing HIV prevention programmes for youths, existing programmes have had limited impact on the trajectory of the HIV and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic, especially among youths (Chimbindi et al., 2020; Zungu et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2017). Although imperative, when implemented as ‘stand-alone’ interventions, HIV prevention education programmes have shown endemic
weaknesses and limited potential to eliminate the social and economic impediments that exacerbate the impact of the HIV pandemic among youths. Several sources, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2021), Khalifa et al. (2019), Child Protection in Crisis (CPC) (2013) and Mabaso et al. (2021), all state that there is an urgent need for tailored, targeted, and rigorous HIV interventions that are appropriate for addressing all known socio-economic and behavioural drivers of HIV infection among youths.

Numerous development agencies and experts, such as Cluver et al. (2016a); Livelihood and Food Security Technical Assistance (LIFT) (2013); Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) (2013); and CPC (2013) call for the adoption of the Combination Social Protection Programme (referred to hereafter as the CSP) strategy, which they view as a remarkable strategy that could be a critical enabler for HIV prevention as it pays attention to the proximal links between structural, social and economic conditions that create barriers for the uptake of HIV prevention programmes by vulnerable youths in disadvantaged contexts. Similarly, Saul et al. (2018) affirms that embracing combination preventative frameworks for HIV prevention is advisable in confronting the structural impediments that drive youths’ HIV risk. According to the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) (2017), when youths are economically empowered, they will have the ability, resources, and knowledge to make and act on a range of decisions that shape their sexual health. This makes combined HIV prevention education and economic strengthening activities an imperative approach.

This study defines the CSP to mean a set of integrated (combined) economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education, implemented concurrently intending to prevent, decrease, and eliminate cumulative vulnerabilities and drivers that put youths at risk of HIV infection. Thus, the CSP is premised on the belief that youths’ HIV risk behaviours in low-resource contexts are largely influenced by structural limitations and deprivations, such as poverty, marginalisation, and lack of HIV prevention information, which need to be addressed to allow healthy decision-making (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2021; De Lannoy et al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2014).
Researchers such as Cluver et al. (2015) have made arguments that HIV mitigation and empowerment programmes that are solely centred on individual behaviours and exclude youths’ socio-economic conditions are most likely to have limited efficacy. Cluver et al. (2015) go on to reveal that there is some considerable anecdotal evidence from East Africa which shows that the combining of social interventions and economic activities holds immense potential for improved economic, health, and HIV prevention outcomes for youths. Chimbindi et al. (2020) add that, as a multi-sectoral approach, the CSP has high acceptability. Influenced by this newer thinking within the field that is now regarded as fundamental, there are numerous South African Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), such as Family Health International (FHI) 360 and HIVSA, that have taken a great interest in utilising the CSP as a multi-faceted and comprehensive programming strategy in working with youths.

The keen uptake of the CSP exists despite there being no conclusive evidentiary basis to demonstrate inextricable links between the programme and HIV prevention outcomes for youths. This study will, therefore, look at the CSP in resource-constrained settings, considering the views and experiences of youth on the efficacy and potential contribution of the programme in improving HIV prevention. This will require the analysis of qualitative data to determine youths’ experiences.

1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In South Africa, Gauteng is among the top two provinces where HIV infection in youths is greatest (Simbayi et al., 2019). According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2022), of South Africa’s estimated 8.45 million People Living with HIV (PLHIV) by 2022, the largest share (over 50%) resides in the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provinces. Various sources note that young people aged between 15 to 24 years are at the epicentre of HIV infections. Simbayi et al. (2019) observe that even though new HIV infections are slowly declining (attributable to South Africa having the highest number of people enrolled on Anti-Retroviral Therapy [ART]) in the world, the spread of HIV remains significantly higher in youths between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Accordingly, UNAIDS (2018, p. 6) states that “there is a prevention crisis” among youths requiring urgent attention. Furthermore, UNAIDS (2018) encourages the establishment of vibrant programmes that address vulnerability factors which amplify...
the adoption of risky behaviour and practices by youths in poor settings. Johnson et al. (2017) notes that if this is not done, the youths will remain a ticking time bomb, with the potential to cost South Africa billions of rands each year in treatment and other opportunity costs.

In Gauteng’s context, the province has an estimated poverty rate of 37%, high levels of inequality, over 40% youth unemployment and numerous informal settlements that have been spurred by unprecedented scales of migration (City of Johannesburg [CoJ], 2019). Over the years, the province has implemented several programmes to mitigate HIV infection among youths. Examples of these programmes include HIV prevention campaigns; life orientation (taught to learners in schools by the Department of Education); health promotion and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education (offered at health facilities and/or through the Department of Health); condom promotion and provision; voluntary male medical circumcision (VMMC); HIV counselling and testing; ART, and some social protection initiatives such as educational subsidies and social grants. The continuously high HIV infection rates among youths are an indication of the inability of these programmes to provide vulnerable youths with assets and capabilities that increase their socio-economic potential to limit HIV susceptibilities. Saul et al. (2018) notes that none of these single interventions emerged as a panacea to averting the runaway cases of HIV infections among youths because of the complicated constellation of conditions that place youths at risk. Thus, the CSP was introduced in South Africa in recent years to see whether integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention education will make a difference in empowering youths to disrupt the drivers and bottlenecks that perpetuate their risks and vulnerabilities to HIV infection.

HIV infections continue to be stubbornly high among youths aged between 15 to 24 years. To arrest the scourge of HIV among youths it is important to understand how CSP, a youth HIV prevention programme, changes youths’ HIV risk behaviours and sexual practices so that the programme can be strengthened or replicated. Despite the arguments in support of the CSP, it is still unclear how integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention education can have positive multiplier effects on youths’ HIV exposure. This study has been justified as there are limited studies available regarding youth experiences of intended outcomes of the CSP. In this
regard, this collective case study will explore youths’ experiences whilst participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programmes in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The following sub-sections present the aim and research questions of the study. The objectives of the study are also introduced.

1.4.1 Aim of the study

The study aims to explore the experiences of youths participating in the Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme with a particular focus on resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa with the aim of understanding how integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention education changes youths’ HIV risk behaviours and sexual practices.

1.4.2 Research Questions

The study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng?

- In what way(s) has participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme (the CSP) changed participating youths’ HIV risk behaviours and sexual practices?

- To what extent are the intended outcomes of the CSP being met in resource-constrained settings?

- What are the factors (if any) that influence the success and/or failure of the CSP in resource-constrained settings?

1.4.3 Objectives of the study

The study is guided by the following objectives:
• To establish the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng;

• To assess the way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme (the CSP) changed participating youths’ HIV risk behaviours and sexual practices;

• To assess the extent to which the intended outcomes of the CSP are being met in resource-constrained settings; and

• To explore the factors (if any) that influence the success and/or failure of the CSP in resource-constrained settings.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Given that a knowledge gap exists (in terms of evidence of the impact of the CSP in preventing HIV amongst youths in disadvantaged communities), this study sheds some light on participants’ views, insights, and experiences regarding the impact of integrating HIV prevention education and economic strengthening interventions on addressing factors that heighten youths’ risks to HIV infection. By doing so, the study also provides knowledge on the contextual determinants of the success or failure of the CSP in poor settings.

Authors such as Diraditsile (2020) and Engelbrecht (2009), are critical of the social work profession’s inability to harness economic strengthening, financial empowerment, and literacy education as a fundamental strategy for the development and mitigation of poverty. Oftentimes, the profession has been challenged to move beyond mere remedial and welfarist approaches if it is to sustainably empower its clientele groups to manage and solve health and socio-economic problems. This study, therefore, undeniably serves as a wake-up call by providing new academic knowledge to social work academia and practice on the applicability of the CSP as an indispensable strategy that should be applied to economically empower and enable vulnerable people to survive socio-economic challenges. Thus, this study adds to the discourse and body of literature debating the social work paradigm shift within the South African context.
The Department of Social Development (DSD), development agencies, NGOs, and policymakers with an interest in youth programmes are poised to benefit immensely as the study makes recommendations on improving policy formulation and practice guidelines related to implementing more effective CSPs. The recommendations and suggestions given are entrenched in the realities and lived experiences of youths who participated in the multi-dimensional programme and can, therefore, provide realistic parameters and insights for the government to diligently reformulate its strategies and practices pertaining to addressing the contentious key issues affecting the youths, namely HIV, poverty, and unemployment.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study explored the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme with a particular focus on the resource-constrained settings of Gauteng, a province that is situated in South Africa. Utilising a case collective study research design, the study focused on six NGOs in CoJ that had youths participating in the CSP. Together with the youths, NGO practitioners and DSD officials also participated in the study. Having these multiple sources of information allowed for collection of in-depth data from bounded systems (cases). The collective case study that was adopted should be distinguished from medical case study which is carried out in clinical research to build evidence-based medical practice. Alpi and Evans (2019) notes that, collective case studies usually encompass a great deal more complexity as they often incorporate multiple streams of data combined in creative ways as opposed to medical case study which might rely on a typical (patient) case report to reach conclusions.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The definition of terms is essential to ensure a common understanding between researchers and their audience of the key concepts and terminologies that are discussed in the study. Monette et al. (2011, p. 30) add that definitions and explanations of concepts enhance readers’ understanding of the context of the study. The following are definitions of the key concepts that are fundamental to this study.
1.7.1 Youth

Youth is best understood as “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence” (UN, 2013, p. 1). In terms of fixed age groups, the concept of ‘youth’ is quite fluid as it varies across countries. In South Africa, the National Youth Policy (NYP) (2020–2030), defines youth as an individual 14 to 35 years of age. On the international stage, bodies such as the UN (2013), prefer the use of a precise definition that identifies youth as young person aged between 15 and 24 years. This study prefers the international definition that recognises youths as those aged between 15 and 24 years.

1.7.2 The Combination Social Protection Programme

According to the UNAIDS (2010), the CSP as a community-based programme is carefully tailored to synergistically utilise a collation of behavioural, structural, and evidence-based interventions to address risks and underlying vulnerability in HIV prevention. In this study, the CSP is thus defined to mean the practice of concurrently combining economic strengthening interventions and HIV prevention education, to support HIV prevention and risks reduction among youths.

1.7.3 Economic strengthening

There are various widely shared definitions of economic strengthening. This study preferred the PEPFAR (2012) definition, namely that economic strengthening is the development of economic assets and capacities to address drivers of poverty and attain sustainable livelihood. Interventions that tend to be associated with economic strengthening in youth programmes include financial literacy, employability, and entrepreneurship training (Moll, 2018).

1.7.4 HIV prevention

The term HIV prevention can be used to embrace the “provision of accurate and appropriately contextualised” array of services, such as health education and counselling for behaviour, which are aimed at capacitating individuals to make informed life choices that lead to improvement of their health (UNAIDS, 2015, p. 27).
This study adopts this definition and observes that HIV prevention activities for youths are targeted at helping them make informed choices regarding sexual behaviours and practices.

1.7.5 Risk

Relevant to this study is the definition by UNAIDS (2015), that risk is a situation with conditions or likelihood that a youth may be exposed to HIV infection. UNAIDS (2015) add that there are certain behaviours by youths that generate and perpetuate risk; for example, having sex that is not protected with various concurrent partners that have not tested for HIV or who chose not to disclose their status even if they know they have HIV.

1.7.6 Vulnerability

According to UNAIDS (2015), vulnerability refers to unequal opportunities, social exclusion, and underlying combination factors (social, cultural, economic, and political) that predispose individuals to HIV infection. Most relevant to youths is the point that is made by UNAIDS (2015, p. 49), that “vulnerability factors include lack of the knowledge and skills required to protect oneself and others; limited access to services and employment; and harmful social and cultural norms which stigmatise and disempower certain populations”.

1.7.7 Empowerment

According to Moll (2018), empowerment is a multifaceted systemic process that enlightens and facilitates an individual to make choices that are informed in an endeavour to realise their fullest potential. Another definition that is relevant in this study is the one provided by Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988), that empowerment is the acquired capability of individuals to attain control socially, economically, and psychologically through access to knowledge, awareness, and skills.

1.7.8 Agency

According to Kabeer (1999), agency is the proficiency to understand one’s goals and undertake actions to accomplish them. Kabeer (1999, p. 438) further states that
agency “encompasses the meaning, motivation, and purpose which individuals bring to their activity”. By adopting this definition, the study acknowledges that agency building is a pre-requisite condition that youth require to apply empowerment that is observable by them making competent decisions about their health and economic progression and well-being.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The chapters are described below:

Chapter One, General overview of the study, covers a general introduction and overview, providing the background to the study and outlining the problem statement and rationale for the study. Research questions, aims and objectives are presented. The relevant terms to the study are also defined.

Chapter Two, Literature review, provides the conceptualisation of the practice of the CSP in resource-constrained settings. Through a review of literature, the chapter explores the complex drivers of HIV for youths and the role that integrating economic strengthening interventions and HIV prevention education can play.

Chapter Three, Theoretical and legislative frameworks, explains the theoretical framework adopted in this study, namely the Empowerment Theory. The applicability of the theory in building youths’ socio-economic skills, purpose, and abilities to withstand factors that contribute to the adoption of risky behaviours is discussed in detail. The chapter also explains how international instruments and South African policies and legislations give direction to the practices of the CSP.

Chapter Four, Research methodology, describes the research methodology that was used in the study which incorporates the approach, the research design, sampling procedure, research instruments utilised, and the methods of data collection and analysis. The trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations observed are included in this chapter.

Chapter Five, Data Presentation and Analysis, presents the findings of the study based on the data gathered. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the findings are presented in line with the themes and sub-themes that emerged. Thereafter,
Chapter Six, Discussion of findings, breaks down the findings and discusses them in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review.

Chapter Seven, Summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations, concludes the study. It provides a discussion of the conclusions that are drawn from the findings and makes recommendations for policymaking and practice of the CSP. The chapter also presents a model that has the potential to catalytically influence the successful implementation of economic strengthening interventions for youths.

1.9 SUMMARY

The general overview of the study, and what the study regards have been discussed in this chapter. There is value to researching this topic as South Africa needs the CSP to build the socio-economic capabilities of youth which can help them make healthy choices that avert HIV infection. Thus, the justification for conducting the study has been clearly outlined. The following chapter reviews relevant literature on the CSP as a programming approach that is being championed for use in HIV prevention efforts among youth in resource-constrained communities.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed discussion on the CSP as a structured economic strengthening intervention and HIV prevention programme among vulnerable youths in resource-constrained locales. Systematic literature searching is recognised as a critical component of any study. While recognising that searching the literature is not a linear process, subject and citation searching of scholarly articles was done mainly utilising Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), ScienceDirect and PubMed in databases. Literature was reviewed on HIV trends among the youths globally and within South Africa, with a specific focus on the risks, vulnerabilities, and life situations that youths endure in the face of HIV/AIDS and unemployment. The chapter tapers into a discussion of the CSP as an innovative and special social protection mechanism targeted at improving the well-being of youths.

Efforts by both central government and NGOs pertaining to the emergence and contemporary practice of the CSP are also discussed in the chapter. This chapter argues that, despite the introduction and existence of a plethora of programmes to address HIV among youths in disadvantaged communities, current HIV statistics show that the infection remains irrepressible among the 15 to 24-year age group. Consequently, one can predict that the adoption of the CSP approach will add value if not a solution to current efforts and programmes intended at assuaging the unpleasant consequences of HIV infection among youths in resource-constrained communities.

2.2 GLOBAL HIV TRENDS AMONG YOUTHs

Several researchers continue to bemoan the ever-increasing new cases of HIV among sub-Saharan African youths. UNAIDS (2021a) estimates that globally, the number of people living with HIV in 2021 was estimated at 37.7 million, of which almost six million of them were youths between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Globally, two out of every seven new cases of HIV were noted to be among young people aged 15 to 24 years (UNAIDS, 2021b). Although a substantial decline of AIDS-related deaths in different age groups has been recorded in recent years in many countries due to increased access to ART, the number of people, particularly youths being infected and dying
from HIV and AIDS remains unacceptably high and thus a veritable concern, especially in poor communities (Tanser et al., 2018). UNAIDS (2021b) postulates that over 680 000 succumbed to illnesses related to AIDS in 2021, of which 70% of these deaths happened in sub-Saharan Africa.

There is consensus among different sources that the worst of the pandemic is experienced in sub-Saharan Africa, with the region noted to contribute about two-thirds (67%) of the cases of people that are living with HIV. In 2021, of the 1.5 million scores of individuals that were infected with HIV, 670 000 were from sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2021a). UNICEF (2021) notes that the chances of adolescent girls and young women (referred to as AGYW, a group that falls between the age of 15 and 24 years of age) residing in sub-Saharan Africa acquiring HIV are two times higher when compared to those of boys and young men of similar ages. This observation is in concurrence with the assertion made by UNAIDS (2021a); of the world's five million youth aged between the years of 15 to 24 that have been diagnosed with HIV, more than 60% are in sub-Saharan Africa and they are predominantly female. UNAIDS (2021b) adds that AGYW contributed to 25% of the new HIV cases in 2021, despite being just a 10% constitution of the population.

Many other scholars, such as Saul et al. (2018) and Muchanyerei and Bila (2017), agree with the above assertions and add their voices; AGYW are far more likely to fall victim to HIV infections than their male counterparts as they must cope with many factors that make them patently vulnerable to HIV. Examples of such factors include marginalisation from the economic sector, poor education, and being victims of continual gender-based violence (GBV).

2.2.1 HIV and youths in the South African context

HIV/AIDS remains the most pressing health challenge and South Africa’s prime cause of death (WHO, 2021). It should be observed that within sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is the ground-zero of the pandemic as it possesses the largest number of HIV cases, with a 13,9% prevalence rate. In 2022, it was estimated that of South Africa's total population of 60,6 million, about 8,45 million were living with HIV (Stats SA, 2022). HSRC (2021) observes that HIV incidence and prevalence vary significantly across
geographic areas, with the majority of PLHIV being concentrated in the Gauteng and KZN provinces.

The frequency of HIV among youths (ages 15 to 24) is estimated to be 5.79% (Stats SA, 2022). According to the HSRC (2021), it is estimated that there were over 240 000 new cases of HIV in 2020. It is further asserted that most of the new infections happened among the youths, with the infections being inordinately higher in females (WHO, 2021). Equally, HSRC (2021) postulates that each week, about 2000 AGYW between the ages of 15 to 24 years get infected with HIV in South Africa.

The sex and age disaggregated data that has been discussed above highlights the disproportionately elevated vulnerability of youths and points to a dire need to address the socio-structural factors which place youths at risk for HIV. Mabaso et al. (2021) note that if South Africa is to change the trajectory of the pandemic, it is important to target youths aged 15 to 24 years considering that the country has a youthful population of approximately 20.4 million or 63.3% in the 15 to 24 age categories. Tanser et al. (2018) add that if the current slow progress of controlling the HIV pandemic amongst this age group is maintained, new HIV infections among youths are expected to increase and the results could be devastating. UNICEF (2021) share similar views with Tanser et al. (2018), namely that there is a prevention crisis amongst youths; although there has been a slight decrease in South Africa’s new HIV cases in recent years, the rate of progress is too slow to significantly influence the trajectory of the ravaging pandemic. At the current snail’s pace, one can assert that HIV will continue to pose the biggest risk to youth, an age category which ideally is the most strategic if the HIV pandemic is to be stopped in its tracks. Khalifa et al. (2019, p. 1) concede that due to the slow HIV response, HIV cases in the youth populations between the age of 15 to 24 years are not projected to decline fast enough to end HIV by the year 2030, as outlined in UNAIDS’ Fast-Track goals (which will be expanded upon later).

2.3 CHARACTERISATION OF RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

Simbayi et al. (2019) and WHO (2021) remark that governments and organisations in the HIV prevention arena must learn to study and identify HIV geographic patterns if
their targeting is to be effective. A thorough understanding of geographic patterns will lead to improved effectiveness of programming strategies, as implementation plans will be informed by studied trends. Considering that countries that are hardest hit by HIV are resource scarce, UNAIDS (2015a) makes an interesting observation; they recommend that studying and understanding HIV geographic trends and variations is key as it helps countries to channel services where needs are greatest. The process of identifying HIV geographic patterns has come to be known as ‘hotspot mapping’. UNAIDS (2015a) further describes hotspot mapping to be a ‘focus for impact’ programming strategy because it makes use of the most granular information and insights available.

Ward et al. (2019) defines an HIV hotspot as a locality where evidence has proven that there is a recurrence of the high prevalence of cases of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Hotspots are also described by Beyrer et al. (2014) as high disease burden and transmission areas marked by rampant factors that push people to practice behaviours that place them at risk of acquiring HIV. The identification and categorisation of hotspot areas are reached after analysing various data sources. UNAIDS (2015a) notes that the sources of this data include sentinel surveillance of antenatal clinic attendees; general population surveys; reviews of HIV and STIs trends and assessment of any other secondary data. In South Africa, HSRC has been entrusted to run consistently reliable HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Surveys (SABSSM) over the years. The last instalments, that is, the 4th SABSSM (2012) and the 5th SABSSM (2017), identify KZN and Gauteng as the leading hotspots with the sharpest transmission and most dominant burden of HIV in the country (Mabaso et al., 2021). In Gauteng, the CoJ Metropolitan Municipality (MM) is noted to be the province’s chief hotspot; its priority regions include Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm.

As already suggested, hotspot mapping has numerous advantages. Ward et al. (2019) regards the process as central in obtaining a distinct insight into the structural vulnerabilities and socio-economic factors that prompt people to engage in HIV risk behaviours. UNAIDS (2015a) expands on this assertion by adding that hotspot mapping is significant in guiding policymakers and health care providers to make an
intelligent assessment of the insufficient financial and human resources in public health efforts to improve the prevention and management of diseases. Khalifa et al. (2019) note that Gauteng is home to an estimated 30% (about 5,10 million) of youths (those aged between 15 to 24 years). Khalifa et al. (2019) further point out that most of the people that are living with HIV are aged between 15 to 49 years and reside in CoJ. In all the areas comprising the hotspots, youths are noted “to be the face of the disease” (Dwyer-Lindgren et al., 2019, p. 172). This is supported by HSRC (2021) and Johnson et al. (2016), who note that, by virtue of residing in the regions that have been marked as the highest in terms of transmission of HIV, the vulnerability of youths is aggravated by the impact of poverty and the lack of economic opportunities to improve their health and socio-economic standings.

Youths living in hotspots encounter many social determinants that hinder their ability to protect themselves from HIV. Key determinants of health are usually the social conditions and systems that people are born into which shape their daily lives as they grow and live their lives (WHO, 2013). Examples of social conditions and systems include a country’s economic policies, cultural practices, social norms, and development programmes and agendas as decided on by political principles. Understanding these social conditions, systems and determinants allows for innovation and the tailoring of a package of interventions and services to match the unique requirements of youth in hotspots. There is a need for substantial, focused, and thoughtful investments in the social, health, economic, and personal assets of youth in the poorest parts of the country (Ward et al., 2019). Thus, the ushering in of the CSP in poor settings is noted to be a bolder, dynamic, and strategic move informed by the realisation that the spread of HIV among youths remains stubbornly high, despite the availability of numerous HIV prevention programmes in the area. This study, therefore, focuses on youths living in the hotspots of Gauteng Province and will seek to understand their experiences of participating in the CSP.

2.4 YOUTHS AND VULNERABILITY

The South African Government’s NYP (2020–2030), as put forward by the Department of Women, Youths and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) (2021), defines youths to include those aged 14 to 35 years. The United States Agency for International
Development (USAID) (2021) observes that, for statistical purposes, it is common for many countries and organisations to categorise youths as those between the ages of 15 to 29 years. However, for policy and programming purposes the same countries expand the age range up to 35 years to accommodate for cultural and other country-specific factors that impact developmental needs and transition of youths to adulthood. Thus, countries and programmes must acknowledge that youth, as a stage of life, has many multifaceted aspects that influence it; as such, youth is not a fixed or linear life stage. USAID (2021) expands on this point by observing that ‘youth’ as a life stage entail intersecting growth and changes in one’s cognitive, social, emotional, physical, cultural, and political inclination. Successful youth engagement and empowerment must be cognisant of these dynamics. It is also common for the term youths and young people to be used interchangeably (USAID, 2021).

While the definition of youths provided by the South African Government includes those aged between the years of 14 to 35, the researcher submits that the definition is too broad and vague as it fails to consider the “different needs, experiences and expectations of younger and older youths” (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 23). One can therefore favour a more precise international delineation of youths as those young people aged between 15 and 24 years as put across by many authors, including De Lannoy et al. (2015, p. 23). This study adopts this definition as the definition focuses “specifically on the transitions from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to young adulthood” (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 23). It is acknowledged that the youth phase of life is not only characterised by physiological changes but also a transition toward both social and economic independence (Zungu et al., 2020). External pressures and influences also play a role that, at times, increase the chances of contracting HIV through risky behaviour. It is through this developmental stage that appropriate interventions such as the CSP are necessary to address these risks.

Youths in resource-constrained settings face many vulnerabilities. In this study, vulnerability will be explained in line with the UNAIDS’ (2015a, p. 43) definition, namely “vulnerability is the likelihood of exposing oneself to several factors in the external environment due to compounding factors that are not under the control of the person or social group”. The HSRC (2021) and WHO (2021) give an apt explanation that vulnerability is a manifestation of a variety of factors that erode the capabilities of
people to evade HIV. These factors can either be a result of lack of prevention knowledge and skills; poor coverage and quality of health services; and harmful social and cultural norms that disempower certain populations, especially AGYW. These factors may act alone or in combination (HSRC, 2021; Mabaso et al., 2021). Risk is further explained as the likelihood that an individual may become infected through certain behaviours that produce favourable conditions for infection, for example, engaging in unprotected sexual activities with multiple partners whose HIV status is unknown (UNAIDS, 2015a). According to Khalifa et al. (2019) and Harrison et al. (2010), youths from resource-constrained backgrounds, when compared to other youths from affluent backgrounds, have multiple chances of vulnerability to infection by HIV.

There is a plethora of studies that show the intricate nexus between diminished capacities within resource-constrained settings and exposure to HIV infection for youths. The high HIV burden in AGYW, for example, is closely connected to several structural determinants and/or factors. With regards to this study, structural determinants are factors outside the control of individuals which have a direct influence on the perceptions and behaviour of the individuals (UNAIDS, 2015a). This general consideration of structural factors encompasses economic, political, social, physical, and cultural features that society chooses to prioritise (UNAIDS, 2015a).

There are many structural factors in resource-constrained settings that compound the vulnerability of youths and make them prone to outcomes that have negative consequences for their future development. According to Zungu et al. (2020), Khalifa et al. (2019) and Harrison et al. (2010), the factors include poverty, cultural norms, GBV, and orphan status. These can influence youth to adopt HIV risk behaviours that include early commencement of sexual activities, having intimate relationships with much older people, having many sexual partners, and not using condoms correctly and consistently (Zungu et al., 2020; Simbayi et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2016). It is also common for youths in poor sub-Saharan settings to have parents/caregivers who have either been diagnosed with HIV or have succumbed to the disease.

Evans et al. (2016) note that youths are an inhomogeneous group, with diverse needs. Youth as a stage of development is marked by the transition to adulthood. It is
complicated by several challenges that might include peer pressure; sexual risk-taking behaviour; search for autonomy; substance use; behavioural issues; physical and sexual abuse; school dropout; unemployment and mental health problems.

Evans et al. (2016) remark that youth populations are both an opportunity and a challenge. Youths can benefit the country and their communities by providing capital or dividend in terms of knowledge and skills that can be harnessed to improve the productivity of the economy (De Lannoy et al., 2015). Programmes such as the CSP are thus important for accelerating the development of youths; these programs build their capacity to enable them to make significant contributions to economic, social, and healthy communities.

2.4.1 Determinants of vulnerability to HIV among South African youths

The fast spread of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa is attributed to numerous drivers. Since the first HIV cases were clinically diagnosed in the United States in the early 1980s, the pandemic has wreaked unprecedented havoc in developing countries, especially in Africa. Although researchers concur that the increase in HIV is caused by a complex combination of aspects, there are still mixed messages regarding which factors are predominant in spreading the virus (Mabaso et al., 2021; Steinert et al., 2016). Johnson et al. (2016) for example, attribute the rocket-pace at which the pandemic is spreading especially among youths, to the cooperation of structural determinants that include unemployment, lack of economic security and gender inequalities. According to Johnson et al. (2016), unless this prevailing dominance-subservience relationship in the region is properly addressed, HIV infection will continue to cause agony among the inhabitants.

This study also embraces the notion that the increase in HIV transmission being experienced by youths, both in South Africa and other developing African nations, is a result of structural factors. These structural factors are defined as a mixture of the social, cultural, economic, policy and societal environments that shape the context in which risk production occurs (Steinert et al., 2016). These include (but are not limited to) poverty, gender imbalances and unemployment. However, it is noteworthy that there is a close link and interplay among these structural factors and there is a very thin line separating them.
2.4.2 The poverty and HIV nexus among youths in South Africa

It has been noted that in countries that are hardest hit by HIV, particularly in South Africa, deprivation and poverty are growing concerns for most households (Mabaso et al., 2018). Paradoxically, the relationship between poverty and the ever-increasing HIV rates remains disputed in the region (Steinert et al., 2016). Nonetheless, empirical evidence has found a positive correlation between the two (Mabaso et al., 2018; UNAIDS, 2018; Steinert et al., 2016).

A study conducted in South Africa by Steinert et al. (2016, p. 1189) sought to understand the links between poverty and illness brought by AIDS; the researchers hypothesise what they term the “upstream effect of poverty on the likelihood of HIV infection”. They also present what they call the “downstream effect of AIDS illness on households’ poverty levels” (Steinert et al., 2016, p. 1189). The findings of these researchers concur with those from other previous studies which explain that the phenomenon of the upstream hypothesis propels further impoverishment of disadvantaged people, mainly women, as they are more likely to feel pushed to engage in age-disparity and transactional sexual relationships, thereby exposing themselves to HIV. Limited education and knowledge related to HIV are also seen as enabling factors for infection. In a similar vein, “chronic malnutrition, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to health infrastructure can increase susceptibility to HIV infection among people living in poverty” (Steinert et al., 2016, p. 1195). On the other end, namely the “downstream hypothesis”, Steinert et al. (2016, p. 1189) argue that AIDS illness can increase the poverty levels in affected families as the economic burden amplifies due to medical and transport expenses. The authors add that it is also common for households or families with illnesses induced by AIDS to be diverted from productive activities and lose income, especially if the breadwinners are also the carers. Should the carers be children, they will miss many days of schooling, or they might drop out of school completely. Adversely, all these developments may perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Dinkelman et al.’s (2008) longitudinal study in Cape Town found some anecdotal and qualitative evidence that suggested links between poverty and risky sexual behaviour. They found that young people from poorer households were very likely to be sexually active at very early ages. Further, the young people exhibited very little evidence of
utilising condoms although they were sleeping with multiple partners. Dellar et al. (2015) complement these observations by noting, from their separate studies in other African countries, that the lower the income in the household, the higher the chances that the young people in the household did not have accurate information or knowledge on HIV/AIDS. Dellar et al. (2015) further observe that young people from low-income households did not know where to go or how to access SRH services within their communities.

Stoebenaua et al. (2016) observe that poor communities encounter various complex and multi-faceted challenges that usher in and elevate vulnerability and infection risks for youths. In concurrence, Johnson et al. (2016) explains that most youths in resource-constrained communities are unemployed, have limited productive assets, are food insecure and live in circumstances characterised by inequality, poor service delivery, and overcrowding. Johnson et al. (2016) adds that, as these youths try to cope with these socio-economic stressors, they end up engaging in practices that aggravate their vulnerability to infection by HIV. Some of the risk practices and behaviours include intergenerational and transactional sex; sex with multiple partners; prostitution; substance misuse and crime. Youths from disadvantaged communities also experience limited educational opportunities, which disempowers them and places them at the lowest level of the social ladder (Dellar et al., 2015). The exclusion from educational opportunities often results in poor economic participation in mainstream economic activities by the youths later in their lives.

Although some studies link household affluence (as opposed to poverty) to the unbridled spread of HIV (Dwyer-Lindgren et al., 2019), having considered all evidence, this study maintains with certainty that poverty plays a central function in HIV transmission among youths in South Africa. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the settings identified as ‘HIV-infection hotspots’ such as Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm in the CoJ, are poor communities characterised by shack dwellings, high unemployment rates, substance abuse as well as petty and organised crimes. Consequently, it becomes imperative to explore the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programmes in these resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province. A clear understanding of this economic strengthening and HIV prevention intervention among the youths is paramount to
achieving UNAIDS’ 95-95-95, a critical strategy aimed at expediting all people living with HIV to be diagnosed, put on treatment, and be virally suppressed. According to UNAIDS (2015b), the 95-95-95 strategy is judged to be successful when 95% of all HIV-positive individuals are diagnosed, 95% of those diagnosed are provided ART, and 95% of those treated achieve viral suppression.

While some countries have realised great accomplishments in reducing the number of deaths after the massive roll-out of ART, it is still crucial to explore the potential contribution by the CSP to reduce, and possibly eradicate, the practice of risk behaviours which perpetuate HIV infections among vulnerable youths in poor settings of Gauteng Province.

2.4.3 Youth unemployment trends in South Africa

Youth unemployment is a phenomenon that has become global, not only affecting developing but developed nations as well (Dagume & Gyekye, 2016). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2022) observes that Africa boasts not only the fastest growing but also the most youthful population in the world. ILO (2022) further notes that 62% of sub-Saharan Africa’s unemployed population is youths under the age of 25. The escalating rate of unemployment among the youths is a serious concern for various stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, policymakers, and academic researchers. South Africa has stubbornly high rates of unemployment, with the official unemployment rate pegged at 34,5% in the first quarter of 2022 (Stats SA, 2022a). The expanded unemployment rate, which includes people who are available for work but have stopped looking, is observed to be at 45,5% for the same period (Stats SA, 2022a).

Youth unemployment is noted to be at its worst, with estimations that almost one in every two young people of working age is unemployed (Stats SA, 2022a). As an example, Stats SA (2022a) observes that although there was a slight decrease in the number of unemployed persons, only a meagre 244 000 gained employment in the first quarter of 2022, out of an estimated 2,5 million young people aged 15 to 24 years who are unemployed. This researcher prefers Graham et al. (2018) and Stats SA’s (2022a) narrower definition of unemployed youths as referring to those who are
immediately available for work and are actively seeking work but cannot secure paid work.

Graham et al. (2018) and Shankar et al. (2016) note that, although the labour market factors that affect older workers are the same as those that affect youths, the youths face additional challenges and obstacles that are specific to them. These obstacles are experienced on two levels of the labour market, namely demand and supply. Generally, this leads to poor or lower employability and economic participation rates, which in turn breeds long-term negative consequences for the well-being of youths. Another important point that Graham et al. (2018) expand on is that youth unemployment in African settings mostly continues to affect female youths, and is highest for those residing in urban townships, informal settlements, and rural areas.

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) performed by Stats SA for Quarter One of 2022 shows that high unemployment rates continue to be recorded for youths aged 15 to 24 years and 25 to 34 years, at 63,9% and 42,1% respectively. Stats SA (2022a) submits that, of the country’s 10,2 million population of young people aged between 15 to 24 years, about 3,8 million (37%) of them were not recorded to be in employment, education, or training (NEET). Stats SA (2022a) further explains that the total NEET percentage increased by 4,6 percentage points in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the first quarter of 2021. These NEET rates are disheartening, as no country can progress or thrive when the bulk of its young people are idle and out of work.

There is a substantial and ever-growing body of research in South Africa that explains the drivers of the current severe state of youth unemployment. There has been no observable growth in the country’s gross domestic profit to create and sustain employment (Stats SA, 2022a). There is also a mismatch between the skills that young graduates have and the exact skills that the mainstream economy is looking for (Stats SA, 2022a). Moreover, young people generally lack awareness of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities within the existing economic sectors. The lack of networking opportunities, mentorship and incubator programmes in the employment sector has not helped the youths. The Department of Higher Education and Training (2019, p. 65) sums it up well that; the lack of structured, systemic, and sustainable employment opportunities for young people and the poor economic transformation discourse in the country result in young people seeming to “exist in silos” with no concerted efforts to
integrate them in the various sectors of the economy. There is an urgent need for the government and the private employment sector to put measures in place that allow for economic growth and the generation of inclusive and sustainable jobs that match the scale of social needs. Graham et al. (2018) observes that the scarcity of employment for youths is a serious socio-economic concern that has an indisputable structural or systemic interconnectedness with poverty. This association between unemployment and dire poverty is described by Graham et al. (2018, p. 34) as “bi-directional causality”, as unemployment triggers poverty and poverty contribute to unemployment and its continuity. Dagume et al. (2016) single out unemployment as the major hurdle to poverty eradication or reduction in South Africa. According to Graham et al. (2018), high school drop-out rates among youths, as well as poor schooling conditions, result in inferior quality of education. This contributes to many young people being unable to transition into the employment sector, thus the poverty trap continues unabated. Graham et al. (2018) adds that high youth unemployment is exacerbated by the shrinking growth of the employment sector/market as well as the systemic mismatch between the skills required by the modern South African economy and the skills that are being produced.

According to Stats SA (2022a), youths are over-represented among the poor. With estimations that over 60.5% of the country’s young people between the ages of 15 to 24 years live in poor households, either with very low or no income at all; it is reasonable to deduce that these youths experience concentrated and multiple interrelated dimensions of deprivations that often co-occur because of the burden of poverty and unemployment. The deprivations experienced by the youths go beyond financial lack but also include curtailed access to public services that include good quality health care, housing, and quality education. These various interrelated dimensions of poverty or ‘vulnerabilities’ affect the health and mental well-being of youths in a significant manner, as youths will often feel trapped, helpless, and socially isolated. The situation is very dire to an extent that some authorities regard South Africa youths as “a lost generation” or a “ticking time bomb” needing to be “diffused” (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 22). It is warned that if government do not speedily reduce the alarming levels of youth poverty and unemployment, the youths might engage in violent protests, which would pose a threat to national peace.
Shedding light on youth and poverty De Lannoy et al. (2015, p. 25) argue that poverty amongst youths is not only in terms of income but could also be represented by a lack of other kinds of capitals. These capitals could either facilitate or impede the chances of youths to progress or thrive in today’s world. As an example, youths in low-income settings may lack what the authors call “cultural capital” In explaining the significance of “cultural capital” De Lannoy et al. (2015, p. 25) note that a youth born in a poorer family is more likely to have restricted opportunities throughout his or her life, compared to a youth born in a wealthier household. Youths from disadvantaged backgrounds might also experience a lack of financial means (“economic capital”), which will lead to them not having assets, such as land, that they can use as collateral to access finances from banks to start their businesses (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 25). The youths might also have very limited recognition, prestige, or social standing (“symbolic capital”), a situation which usually results in their voices and opinions not being heard (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 25). Lastly, the authors note that youths in resource-constrained settings have poor social links (“social capital”). Having poor “social capital” means that the youths will not have connections to people of influence whom they can leverage to improve their access to quality educational institutions or to penetrate the ever-shrinking labour market (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 25).

It should be noted that all these aspects of deprivation and lack of the different kinds of capital described above are interrelated and are in fact mechanisms that work in sync, supporting each other in various ways to perpetuate intergenerational transmission of poverty in resource-constrained settings. Alkire and Santos (2014) add that, besides having severe health, social and economic consequences on youths, poverty contributes to youths’ lack of access to information that they could use to underpin their decision-making, especially regarding issues of their health and sexual relations. Understanding the multiple intersections of these elements is essential in instituting proficient and inclusive programmes and policies that guide and nudge today’s youths to stay focused as they endeavour to dismantle the curse of poverty that gets passed from one generation to the next.
2.4.4 HIV infection and gender disparities among youths

The link between gender imbalances and the risk for HIV infection, particularly for female youths, must not be underestimated. That female youths aged 15 to 24 are at the epicentre of the HIV pandemic in Southern Africa is widely documented and indisputable (Mabaso et al., 2018; UNAIDS, 2018; UNICEF, 2018; Dellar et al., 2015). According to Erulkar (2014), youth is a critical stage when, for many female youths, vulnerability is consolidated, their rights irremediably lost, and their health compromised. Whilst the foundation of female youth vulnerability still requires to be exhaustively understood, there is some consensus that female youths possess eight times higher susceptibility to infection than their male age mates (UNAIDS, 2018; Dellar et al., 2015).

Different factors can be attributed to the high occurrence of HIV among female youths and may vary among sub-regions, countries, and contexts (Mabaso et al., 2018). UNAIDS (2019) bemoans the existence of laws and policies that discourage female youths from accessing healthcare services, especially sexual and reproductive services, without the agreement of parents and guardians in some sub-Saharan countries. Mabaso et al. (2018) attribute the soaring HIV incidences among female youths to societal norms that lead to gender inequalities and unequal power dynamics between males and females, as well as high-risk behaviours among this key population. These behaviours include early commencement of sexual activities, having numerous sexual partners, failure to use condoms, violence among sexual partners, engaging in transactional sex and having sex with much older people. These gender-based disparities and violence, combined with the biological and physiological make-up of women place female youths at huge risk of HIV infection.

Erulkar (2014) observes that inequitable gender roles and gender-related restrictions on mobility are overarching structural impediments that isolate female youths and contribute to their vulnerability. The author adds that the marginalisation of female youths limits their opportunities to participate in programmes meant to protect them, reduce their risk, and provide them with opportunity-opening assets that interrupt the pathway to HIV infection. Expressed differently, the isolation and marginalisation that female youths experience is a hindrance to their abilities to develop livelihood skills, friendships, and peer support networks. As primaeval as this might read, it is still very
common practice for some families in poor South African communities to prefer sending the male child to school over the female child. Stockl et al. (2013) attribute this to the deep-rooted norms, attitudes and behaviours that assign females a second-class citizen status compared to males. Stockl et al. (2013) add that high education costs have also exacerbated the situation. With a lack of education and opportunities, female youths are driven into premature and unhealthy sexual relations in which they experience all the different forms of violence from their sexual partners who are usually older men, because of low and poor relationship equity, in terms of resources and control that they bring in the relationships (Mabaso et al., 2021). The HSRC (2021) and Zungu et al. (2020) assert that the early commencement of sexual activities before the age of 15 is a very common occurrence among young people in Gauteng Province and is another major driver of HIV.

Paradoxically, some of these societal beliefs and norms (such as masculinity) are vehemently defended as the last stronghold of traditional culture in the plight to deal with genuine socio-economic challenges in some African resource-constrained settings. Female youths continue to be tempted to enter relationships with older men because of the perceived socio-economic and even psychological and emotional benefits associated with such relationships (Stockl et al., 2013). Datta et al. (2015) note that some studies emphasise economic benefits related to age-disparate partnerships, as males are traditionally believed to earn more as they grow older, hence they can financially provide for their partners. In the same vein, a higher socio-economic standing may be regarded by some women as an advantage when they consider a relationship. Accordingly, some young women may prefer older men for status purposes as well as the perceived notion that older men are well equipped to provide for both the sexual and emotional needs of their partners (Datta et al., 2015). Noteworthy, however, is that these perceptions are inaccurate as shown by previous studies (Simbayi et al., 2019). Due to their socio-economic status, the same older men have the potential to engage in multiple sexual relationships and their partners might lack the voice to negotiate safe sex - including condom use. This is common for women in resource-constrained communities who enter transactional sex due to the net benefits associated with such relationships.
Addressing the above outlined key contributors to HIV infection will be one of the long-term solutions to curbing the spread of the pandemic (HSRC, 2021; UNAIDS, 2021a; Johnson et al., 2017; Datta et al., 2015). Whilst subscribing to this viewpoint, this researcher is of the perspective that the CSP approach, which targets both males and females, will assist not only in slowing HIV infection but also in disrupting the long-standing factors that propel gender disparities in many poor communities. Information on HIV prevention, on its own, will never suffice to address the socio-economic drivers that force youths to engage in risk behaviours. Young males and females must be provided with both HIV education as well as the economic wherewithal to ensure that they shy away from risky behaviours. Once young males are equally economically empowered, they too would have the negotiated power to attract young women into lasting sexual relationships, thus addressing the issue of age disparities as a driving factor for the spread of HIV infection.

2.5 GAPS AND LIMITATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL YOUTH HIV PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

Since the discovery of HIV, several HIV prevention interventions and strategies for the youths have been instituted by different African governments, international development agencies, private voluntary organisations, and NGOs. UNAIDS (2015b) describes an intervention as a calculated set of processes and activities intended to bring about sustainable change in identified aspects impacting an audience in specific settings. To arrest the spread of HIV in Africa, resources, time, and energy were devoted to developing numerous low-cost interventions. However, this researcher agrees with the authors who have noted that these numerous interventions have not produced the desired outcomes, as evidenced by the increasing rate of HIV infection among young people in South Africa.

The most notable public and community interventions that have been implemented over the years include the “ABC” model (promotion of abstinence, be faithful and condom use), HIV counselling and testing, HIV prevention campaigns, condom use promotion, VMMC, ART and a host of social protection initiatives such as conditional social grants. Recently, more interventions that include the promotion of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), HIV self-testing, as well as media campaigns have been added.
Over the years, South Africa’s HIV/AIDS strategic plan has always been coordinated by the Department of Health. The plan focused on two aspects, namely prevention and treatment programmes. The prevention programme emphasised three components, which are awareness campaigns, ART provision and condom promotion. The programme also focused on HIV information dissemination and prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). The treatment roll-out plan also entailed three main components, namely ART provision, healthy life project and nutrition project. It is paramount to observe that the treatment plan which has been highly emphasised deals with individuals who are already infected with HIV.

South Africa has scored some successes with its ART provision (treatment) programme, rated to be the biggest in the world. As an example, Shisana et al. (2014) note that in 2012 the percentage infected with HIV in South Africa had raised from about 10.6% in 2008 to above 12.2% in 2012. Shisana et al. (2014) explained that the observed escalation rate in infection was largely attributable to the successfully expanded ART programme that was now allowing individuals that are infected with HIV to live considerably longer, resulting in greater proportions of those infected with HIV surviving. UNAIDS (2019) nonetheless state that the success of the ART programme run in South Africa is highly debatable as the ever-increasing HIV infections, especially among youths, threaten to outweigh the perceived benefits of providing universal access to ART for all those who are eligible.

A striking point is made by UNAIDS (2019) that existing prevention interventions suffer from numerous common weaknesses as they overwhelmingly focus on decreasing individual exposure and risk, with very limited efforts made to address the structural factors, especially socio-economic, that are known to be notorious for fermenting vulnerability to HIV. UNAIDS (2019) adds that national HIV prevention processes and activities too often comprise a collection of disjointed plans that are characterised by poorly expressed causal pathways as well as unclear measurable indicators. This argument is supported by other authors, such as Hankins (2004, p. 1915), who criticises the ABC model of HIV prevention for being plainly “individualistic,” by not giving enough room or attention to the debilitating social, cultural, and economic aspects that shape the behaviours that put people at risk and “are particularly effective in reducing the choices and autonomy of young people”. Similar submissions are
made by Austrian and Muthengi (2014), who comment that siloed youths programmes that are often implemented in sub-Saharan Africa inadvertently fuel social exclusion and economic isolation for youths and prevent them from having a healthy transition into adulthood.

Many other scholars and development agencies lament the failure of usual ways of doing business to yield long-term and desired solutions regarding HIV prevention among youths in disadvantaged communities. Cluver et al. (2015) question the responsiveness and effectiveness of HIV prevention programmes when implemented in a silo. The author advocates for a change in approach through the adoption of the CSP, a strategy that entails combining the different HIV prevention and education interventions with other interventions that also promote an individual’s socio-economic condition. PEPFAR (2017); LIFT (2013); CARE (2013) and CPC (2013) concur with Cluver et al. (2015); there is a need to integrate HIV prevention education with economic strengthening interventions in addressing the interacting causes of HIV risk and vulnerability. Thus, the above-mentioned agencies connote that limited success has been achieved because youth programmes have not been proactive in tailoring and integrating initiatives that address the proximal links and causal pathways between economic conditions and HIV prevention education.

In unison with the above observation, Mark et al. (2017) and Johnson et al. (2017) assert that an imperative cog in the fight against HIV will be the adoption of effective, innovative, rigorous, and evidence-based programming approaches that significantly target the unique root causes of youth’s socio-economic and behavioural vulnerability. The achievement or collapse of prevention efforts is influenced by the strategies that programmes and countries adopt in working with youths (Cluver et al., 2016a). The CSP is, therefore, seen as a critical HIV prevention enabler that can interrupt the pathway to HIV infection by promoting protective, risk reduction, and opportunity-opening behaviours for youths (Cluver et al., 2016a). Sharing similar views with Cluver et al. (2016a), PEPFAR (2017) advocates for the adoption of the CSP by suggesting that the interaction effects between economic strengthening and HIV prevention education could be very positive because when youths are economically empowered, they will have the ability, resources, and knowledge to make and act on a range of decisions that shape their sexual health. Put in other words, an integrated approach
that combines economic strengthening initiatives and HIV prevention education is considered critical to yielding positive results for youths’ overall well-being.

In terms of the practice of social work, it is quite interesting to observe that some of the arguments that have been raised above against conventional HIV prevention programmes are comparable to the calls that have been made for the social work profession to transform from confining itself in residual, reactive and short-term solution mode to being developmental and radical by spearheading the ushering in of macro-proactive interventions to address challenging community problems such as HIV. Social work educators such as Lane and Pritzker (2017) and Engelbrecht (2008) thus challenge the profession to transform itself and initiate projects that can address the impact of socio-economic effects as well as the structural sources of marginalisation, inequality, and poverty. It is the conviction of the researcher that the CSP as an HIV prevention strategy, is a potentially ‘comprehensive’, radical, and developmental strategy, breaking from the norm by seeking to carefully tailor interventions, and intervening strategically in multiple ways that break complex factors that shape HIV risk and vulnerability for youths. This study will therefore unearth the components contained in the CSP by exploring the experiences of youths participating in this intervention within CoJ.

2.6 THE EVOLVEMENT OF COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

This section looks at the evolvement of the CSP and will also discuss the approach’s basic tenets. In many developing countries, governments address poverty and deprivation with various mechanisms to help individuals and their communities put up with risks and volatility at different stages of their lifespans in what has become known as social protection (UNICEF, 2014). The World Bank (2018) notes that social protection interventions are well recognised for promoting resilience, equity, and opportunity by helping protect individuals and societies from poverty and destitution. World Bank (2018) further states that social protection, which is sometimes referred to as the social safety net and/or social assistance, comprises non-contributory projects aimed at helping individuals, households, and communities to cope with acute poverty, indigence, and vulnerability.
UNICEF (2014) observes that in South Africa, the state is the chief funder of social protection projects or interventions as it funds numerous social grant programmes to assist poor communities. Social grants are amongst the most notable social protection initiatives in the country. The most common social grants are child-support grants, disability grants, old-age assistance, transfer of unconditional and conditional cash to indigent populations, emergency food aid, agricultural subsidisation, public works projects, savings support, school feeding, and fee waivers (educational subsidies). These social grants perform an important function in decreasing money-metric insufficiency (Brockerhoff, 2013). The ILO (2017) observes that besides social grants, social protection is expansive as it includes instituting measures and institutions that guarantee access to rights, health provision and social services. Equally, Brockerhoff (2013) notes that the practice and terminologies of social security and social protection are sometimes interchangeably applied. According to the author, social protection is varied from social security because social security carries wider applications and is inclusive of developmental strategies. The researcher will not delve into a discussion that seeks to explore the scope of social protection and its differences from social security, as that is beyond the scope of this study.

Although most of the social protection initiatives in South Africa are funded and implemented by the state, through the DSD and the South African Social Security Agency, NGOs also play a crucial role (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2014). Although social protection is meant to be a social risk reduction and management strategy that broadens economic growth and the development of markets, the UNDP (2014) and UNICEF (2014) note that a great variety of social protection interventions have been mostly inapplicable and inappropriate for households of low-income and communities that are financially vulnerable in general. The two United Nations (UN) bodies criticise social protection interventions for being ‘product-oriented’ and for failing to transition poor people from welfare to self-sufficiency. In the context of this study, it has been recognised that the current mix of social protection mechanisms in South Africa has endemic weaknesses and limited potential to remove crippling economic and social barriers that exacerbate the impact of the HIV pandemic among youths. According to the World Bank (2018, p. 13), for the poor and vulnerable, much more needs to be done regarding social protection.
programmes as there are significant disconcerting gaps in coverage and benefit levels, “with data suggesting that in low-income countries social protection programs cover only 18% of the poorest quintile”. The biggest criticism of social protection grants is that they do not empower youths in poor communities to address poverty that increasingly pushes them to adopt economically driven risky behaviours that expose them to HIV infection (UNAIDS, 2018). Consequently, after realising some of the shortfalls and ineffectiveness of the models of social protection mentioned above, the practice of social protection has moved to promote context-specific solutions to poverty inequality and exclusion. This is in line with the World Bank's (2018) observation, that social protection is continually changing in the world.

Although the CSP is an offshoot and is frequently conflated with social protection, the two vary profoundly in their approach. The definition of the CSP is conceptually expansive and has evolved. As already mentioned, current social protection, just like conventional HIV prevention programmes, has produced a limited effect on the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS pandemic - as they are implemented as stand-alone interventions, with no sufficient impetus to remove social and economic barriers that exacerbate the impact of HIV pandemic among youths (Swann, 2018). The CSP strategy thus remarkably goes beyond the scope of conventional social protection mechanisms by calling attention to the proximal links between structural, economic, and social circumstances that create barriers to the uptake of HIV prevention programmes by vulnerable youths in disadvantaged contexts.

Kim et al. (2009) asserts that, by virtue of addressing factors at multiple levels (individual and community), the CSP mobilises different stakeholders, such as the community, different government departments, NGOs, and the private sector, in a collective mission which enhances partnership, cooperation and coordination for the benefit of youths. One can also point out that the kind of partnerships that are cultivated in the CSP are powerful in creating processes for capacity building and learning and are also flexible for promoting continual adaptation and improvement. It can also be added that, by fostering collaborations between communities, youths, government, development agencies and NGOs, the CSP maximises impact and sustains prevention gains over time by cultivating oneness of purpose to deliver a
strong programme. In other words, by addressing the problems of fragmented and ad-hoc approaches that dodge the conventional ‘silo’ HIV prevention interventions, the CSP builds and strengthens a strategic and common sense of purpose and mutual accountability among stakeholders.

The key thrust of the CSP approach is the integration of economic strengthening and HIV prevention education activities to improve HIV outcomes in the youths. The approach regards economic infirmity as both a source and a consequence of adverse SRH outcomes. Economic empowerment is thus regarded as means of increasing youths’ possession of and control over economic assets, which gives youths the leverage they need to reduce sexual risk-taking behaviours. Figure 1 highlights the rationality behind the practice of the CSP.

**Figure 1: The Schematic Evolution of Combination Social Protection approach**
*Source: Researcher’s construction*

Figure 1 depicts that the CSP uses a mix of strategic and simultaneous HIV prevention education and economic strengthening activities to confront the structural and behavioural factors that put youths at risk of acquiring HIV. When combined, HIV prevention education and economic strengthening interventions are deemed to be synergistic and complementary, as the CSP assumes integrating economic and HIV prevention skills is a core pre-requisite for building HIV protective and risk reduction assets among youths. The contents and basic tenets of the CSP are discussed in further detail in the section below.
2.7 THE CURRICULUMS AND BASIC TENETS OF THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Swann (2018) and Johnson et al. (2017) remark that integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention interventions calls for the active engagement and sustained collaboration of various sectors and stakeholders. The development, adaptation and refinement of economic strengthening and HIV prevention education curricula that are now being used in the South African context are attributed to FHI 360’s Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES) project. According to FHI 360 (2021), the ASPIRES project is premised on the realisation that economic challenges are inseparably related to HIV risk behaviours, as well as unwanted outcomes, at every stage of the treatment and care of HIV. Thus, the ASPIRES project encourages the application of evidence-based programming that is gender-sensitive, to improve and progress the health and economic security of highly vulnerable youths. The HIV prevention education curricula that are used in the project were originated by Health and Education Training and Technical Assistance Services (HETTAS), a South African NGO, in collaboration with the Harvard University School of Public Health. Both FHI 360 and HETTAS acknowledge the support that they received from PEPFAR, the USAID and a consortium of leading organisations and experts in developing the curriculums as well as in building the capacity of other NGOs in the country.

2.7.1 Economic strengthening content

The economic strengthening component seeks to provide socio-economic opportunities to youths to enable them to grow and thrive by becoming economically independent and active citizens living in dignity, thereby lowering the degree of vulnerability that exposes youths to the risks of HIV. The Economic Strengthening Package that is offered in the CSP constitutes three separate but integrated curriculum/core modules. These are discussed below.

2.7.1.1 Financial capability

This module is regarded as the foundational pillar of economic strengthening. The module has 16 sessions, with each session being about one-hour long. This
curriculum prioritises financial literacy, building on the understanding that the ability to understand financial concepts and money management (earning, spending, saving, borrowing, and investing) can be translated skilfully into behaviour. Johnson et al. (2017) state that financial literacy/capabilities enable youths to be prudent decision-makers when it comes to making financial choices and working towards financial goals. The authors add that financial literacy/capabilities also develop the discerning skills of youths that are fundamental for comprehending financial risks and opportunities, which is essential in developing realistic values, skills and habits needed to succeed economically at an individual level.

2.7.1.2 Employability skills

This module helps youths build self-awareness and personal development and connects them to entry-level job opportunities. This employability or workforce readiness module has 12 sessions, with each session being about one-hour long. This module is designed to help address youths’ unemployment, joblessness, and poor economic participation, which have stubbornly persisted in poor communities. The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) (2018) notes that many youths in South Africa struggle with issues of accountability, responsibility and commitment needed to secure and succeed at a job. The employability module, therefore, aims at skilling youth job seekers to enhance their chances of finding employment. Youths are taken through soft skills that include work ethics, communication, negotiation, commitment, honesty, time management, listening and decision-making skills. The module also helps youths to compile job applications and it trains them on interview processes before matching and placing them with willing companies where their technical skills are required. The quality and reach of job placements are enhanced through structured linkages to internships and job exchange movements or platforms that connect youths with quality and decent employment opportunities.

2.7.1.3 Entrepreneurship skills

This is an evidenced-based skills module which helps youths to think about, actively starting and sustaining their micro-enterprises. The module has eight sessions which are about one-hour long. In comparison to other countries on the African continent,
South Africa has the lowest participation of youths in entrepreneurship, at a meagre 12.8% (NYDA, 2018). These claims are backed by Stats SA (2022a), which notes that of South Africa’s national population, only about 6% of young people are actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities. This statistic is disheartening as it reflects that it is difficult to develop your own business or to secure business opportunities if you are a young South African.

The entrepreneurship module, therefore, aims to impact youths’ entrepreneurship attitudes and aspirations by training them in practical business skills needed to understand the development and management of business enterprises and cooperatives. After assistance with developing business plans, youths are supposed to be linked with business incubation platforms (for mentorship and support), finance institutions (for capital) and markets. The module is premised on the view that fostering effective entrepreneurial projects for the youths should be regarded as a paramount strategy to incorporate them into the business innovation market, thereby granting them an opportunity to participate meaningfully to uphold economic development in their respective communities.

2.7.2 HIV prevention content

The HIV prevention intervention components, which are delivered concurrently and/or sequentially with economic strengthening, are drawn from ‘Vhutshilo 2’; a well-regarded HIV prevention education curriculum that was developed in South Africa. As previously mentioned, HETTAS (a South African NGO) in consultation and partnership with the Harvard University School of Public Health, developed the curriculum (Thurman et al., 2016; Swartz et al., 2012). Vhutshilo, the Venda word for “life”, is a structured HIV prevention and socio-educational curriculum that is delivered to youths using a peer-led model.

There are three curriculums under the Vhutshilo flagship. There is i) Vhutshilo 1, which serves 10 to 13-year-olds; ii) Vhutshilo 2, which serves 14 to 24-year-olds and finally, iii) Vhutshilo 3, which is meant for 14 to 24-year-old youths living with HIV. The youths targeted by this study are participating in Vhutshilo 2. Vhutshilo 2 consists of 16 interactive and participatory one-hour sessions, conducted with approximately 15 youths participants in a group. The curriculum covers topics such as understanding
HIV and other STIs; decision making; gender roles and gender violence; coping without drugs and alcohol; healthy ways to express one’s feelings; understanding and seeking different kinds of support; dealing with loss and grief; healthy relationships and staying safe in sexual relationships. Being a participatory curriculum, many activities within the sessions allow participants to practice what they learned and build the skills necessary for HIV prevention, such as negotiating safe sex or delaying first sex, negotiating consistency and correct use of a condom, discussing HIV testing and contraception with partners, recognising violence in its different forms, and knowing where to go for help in instances of abuse.

Thurman et al. (2016) notes that as an HIV prevention education curriculum, Vhutshilo is premised on empowering and building the social and health assets of youths by equipping them with capabilities and information to practice safe behaviours and avoid risks that could lead to the spread of HIV infections. Thurman et al. (2016) and Swartz et al. (2012) believe that, if implemented correctly, this well-designed prevention education curriculum can attract and engage youths and have a welcome effect on attitudes and behaviour.

Thurman et al. (2016) observe that Vhutshilo was shaped by evidence and designed to provide youths with the essential assets that they require to increase their ability to circumvent infection. Erulkar (2014, p. 11) defines an asset as “a store of value—a valuable thing—that youths can use to reduce vulnerabilities and expand opportunities”. As an illustration, self-esteem is a very valuable asset. Youths can use their self-esteem to excel at a job interview and to navigate discussions for safer sex with their intimate partners. Erulkar (2014) and Population Council (2011) both note that assets that can be obtained by youths from an HIV prevention curriculum, such as Vhutshilo, can be in distinct categories, mainly social assets (such as peer support networks, and individual relationships of trust) and human assets (such as information and capabilities, good health, power to negotiate, autonomy to make self-sustaining decisions). For youths in resource-constrained settings, the Vhutshilo HIV prevention curriculum responds directly to the vulnerabilities that heighten the risk of HIV infection and curtails the youths from reaching their full potential. Thurman et al. (2016) and Swartz et al. (2012) assert that Vhutshilo could work as a mechanism for connecting youths to health platforms and resources. It offers safe spaces in which youths are
acknowledged and where they can acquire peer support, friendships, livelihood skills, and mentorship from trusted sources (Thurman et al., 2016; Brady et al., 2007).

2.7.3 The Combination Social Protection Programme

The CSP is built on the realisation that there is a deep connection between youths’ economic self-sufficiency and their health behaviour. According to Saul et al. (2018), to address the complex constellation of health, education, psychosocial and economic factors, it is a prerequisite to have programmes that blend evidence-based methodologies and go further than the health sector by tackling factors that promote structural exclusion from economic opportunities. The authors observe that, although there might be individual interventions that might “have shown promise, no single intervention has emerged that can avert the majority of new HIV infections in youths” (Saul et al., 2018, p. 2). Chimbindi et al. (2020) and Saul et al. (2018) therefore, discuss the importance of combination socio-economic programmes, such as DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe), that are designed to implement multi-faceted and integrated health, education, psychosocial, and economic core packages of interventions.

Programmes that employ combination approaches have a good chance to help youths build various assets that reduce vulnerability to HIV and increase their agency and empowerment. Thus, leveraging socio-economic strengthening and health interventions is a critical function of the asset-building process targeting marginalised youth (Chimbindi et al., 2020). The complementarity between economic strengthening and health interventions is also acknowledged by Barros-Lane and Pritzker (2016) and Austrian and Muthengi (2014, p. 169), who note that the concept of “asset building” in combination with socio-economic activities and projects is vital not only for enhancing economic results but also for promoting health and a diverse range of other positive outcomes. The social assets that one could gain from combination socio-economic approaches are vital in supporting them to build and strengthen competencies and versatilities which they need to respond and adapt to their social context (Chimbindi et al., 2020; Gourlay et al., 2019; Saul et al., 2018). Therefore, building youths assets reduces vulnerability and expands opportunities for them.
Thurman et al. (2016) and FHI 360 (2021) concur that the curriculums used in the CSP are robust and comprehensive, as they are conceptually informed by diverse interacting economic and health factors that expose youths in resource-limited settings to HIV risk and vulnerability. Figure 2 provides a summary of the CSP’s social asset-building framework for vulnerable youths.

Figure 2: The Combination Social Protection asset-building framework
Adapted: Saul et al. (2018)

2.8 PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Cluver et al. (2015) note that there is some significant evidence from East Africa that underscores that the integration of economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities possesses high acceptability, influence, and reach, making it a potentially powerful mechanism for improving HIV, health, and development outcomes for youths. The sustained success of combination approaches is dependent on their potential to address and confront individual-level risks and foster an amenable environment that favours the adoption of health behaviours (World Bank, 2018).
UNAIDS (2018) adds that, in the fight against HIV, the countries that have produced sharp, uninterrupted, and sustained declines in new HIV cases have employed combination prevention approaches. Uganda is often cited as the first clear case study of prevention success in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2018). Uganda mixed an array of behavioural change activities and structural approaches, including determined efforts to change social norms, investment in condom promotion, visible involvement, and a commitment to the empowerment of vulnerable youths and people living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2018).

Rwanda is cited as another East African country where there has been an observable decline in HIV cases, particularly among heavily affected populations such as sex workers and pregnant women. The World Bank (2018) notes that this is because Rwanda has pursued several far-reaching combined health and HIV prevention initiatives to address the vulnerabilities of these key populations. Consistent with the ‘hot spot’ tenet of CSP, Rwanda and Uganda’s combination HIV strategies are noted to have been premised on massive epidemiological data and an understanding of behavioural trends that had been plotted from studying local communities closely (UNAIDS, 2018). An assertion can be made that by promoting combined and multi-tiered programmes that champion community inclusion, encouraging mass communication activities, availing assessable and free HIV counselling and testing, building, and strengthening the capacity of local community-based organisations (CBOs), and investing huge resources in social change strategies to challenge social norms pertaining to sex outside of marriage, the two countries were able to put a dent in the spread of HIV.

Building evidence for CSP, Edmeades et al. (2014) point to the results of a study that was conducted in rural Ethiopia, which found that when economic empowerment and sexual as well as reproductive health information was introduced to married AGYW, their savings and usage of family planning services improved significantly. Similarly, in an evaluation of a randomised controlled study in Uganda, Bandiera et al. (2018) concluded that youths who had participated in an Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme had demonstrated improved life competencies, especially regarding financial literacy and pursuing and completing vocational training. Consequently, this
was established “to have increased employment and condom use and to reduce fertility and reports of non-consensual sex” (Bandiera et al., 2018, p. 113).

In East Africa, UNAIDS (2019) note that Kenya has been another sub-Saharan region success story in recent decades, as yearly new HIV cases are now fewer than a third of what the country experienced in 1993, at the pandemic peak in the country. UNAIDS (2019) links the country’s success to its use of mixed structural and behavioural activities, particularly with youths. The ability to bring youths together to participate in empowering and integrated HIV structured programs within safe spaces in their communities is cited as having been important for Kenyan success (UNAIDS, 2019). This is in tandem with findings that were drawn from a research study undertaken in South Africa that noted that AGYW who frequented sports bars had reduced chances of testing positive for HIV when compared to other girls as they were better capacitated from the sessions that they had attended to negotiate for safe condom usage with their sex partners (Erulkar, 2014).

Anderson et al. (2014) and Cluver et al. (2016b), who examined the core principles, practices, and strategies specific to combination prevention approaches and their capacity to empower young people, commended the approaches for setting a ‘disruption agenda’ by demanding that interventions be done differently to empower youth. The ‘disruption agenda’ mandates that youths must be re-tooled to examine their agency, action, and engagement in change efforts meant to improve their situations. Building on empowerment constructs and frameworks, CSP recommends young people be recognised as experts in their lives, with unique perspectives on HIV prevention interventions. The World Bank (2018) however, cautions that for combined or integrated HIV prevention programmes for youths to be successful, strong political support is required as substantial resources should be released to fund community-level empowerment strategies that are central to these programmes.

It is important to point out the other variant views that have been pointed out by some advocates of entrepreneurship concerning the limitations of youth economic strengthening interventions, such as CSP. Gibbs et al. (2017) point out that the main challenge that these programmes face today is that they are lacking in ingenuity, innovation, and perseverance to be disruptive and transformative. Utilising entrepreneurship as an example, the authors level a criticism that the training given to
youths is too generic as it lacks the key elements of any entrepreneurship endeavour, namely, the problems to be solved, the solutions to be created to solve the problems. The authors go as far as noting that in some settings these programmes just represent tired, old ways of doing things and are therefore not agile enough to stir entrepreneurial potential of youth. Abell and Rutledge (2010) who studied the phenomenon and impact of collaborations on youth HIV prevention programmes in the Americas note that youth programmes, such as CSP, are not successful due to poor collaborations and lack of political commitment which contribute to failure to establishment of efficient and profitable entrepreneurial markets for youth.

Another criticism that has been levelled against programmes that combine economic and gender transformative interventions, such as CSP, is that there has been inconclusive research results on whether working with females to strengthen their livelihoods that promotes gender equality and does not lead to their further exclusion, particularly. In their study in India, Krishnan et al. (2010) established that working with female adolescents and married women in gender transformative and economic strengthening interventions had the potential for a ‘male-backlash’ and promotion of further exclusion as some men tended to be conservative and resisted transformation.

In spite of the weaknesses cited above, there still seem to be strong studies and emerging evidence from different parts of the African continent, particularly East Africa, that illustrates the powerful potential that the strategy could have in preventing and decreasing new HIV infections in youths. Development practitioners and governments are being urged to use the CSP. By improving HIV prevention knowledge and increasing economic opportunities, the CSP is regarded as an investment with the potential to have an immediate protective impact on youths as well as communities overall (PEPFAR, 2017). Influenced by this newer thinking within the field that is now regarded as fundamental, there are NGOs in South Africa that have taken a great interest in utilising the CSP as a multi-faceted and comprehensive programming strategy in working with vulnerable youths in low-resource contexts, where the youths’ HIV risk behaviours are largely influenced by structural deprivations such as poverty and lack of HIV prevention information.
The following section dwells on NGOs’ functions and contributions to addressing the HIV pandemic in South Africa. It also discusses the critical part NGOs are taking in the implementation of the CSP.

2.9 THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN ADDRESSING THE HIV PANDEMIC

As part of civil society, it is key to note that NGOs discharge a vital role in human empowerment, human rights promotion, shaping development policies and partnerships, and overseeing their implementation (Asuelime, 2017). Civil society, within the South African context, “has been commonly used to exclusively denote three key actors, namely NGOs, CBOs and Faith-Based Organisations” (FBOs) (Asuelime, 2017, p. 47). With regards to NGOs, the UN (2022, p. 1) notes:

An NGO is any non-profit, voluntary citizen’s group which is organised on a local, national, or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate, and monitor policies, and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organised around specific issues such as health, environment, or human rights.

On the other hand, Asuelime (2017, p. 49) observes that:

CBOs are organisations that are formed and developed within a community usually in response to the felt needs of the people; they may be development oriented or exist for social cohesion purposes. They are often referred to as grassroots organisation. CBOs are distinct in nature and purpose from NGOs. They mainly operate at a local level usually in a specified community which may be a village or location in urban setting.

The above definitions of NGOs and CBOs show that the two differ in terms of scope and structure. While the former tends to be more sophisticated with formalised structures and procedures, the latter brings together individuals and community groupings of different backgrounds; its management structure, governance systems, planning and decision-making procedures are often informal (Mazibuko (2013). According to Choto et al. (2020), both NGOs and CBOs deliver a vital role in advancing
inclusive approaches, raising community awareness, and leveraging societal resources. Although this study subscribes to the notion of NGOs being a subset of civil society organisations involved in development cooperation, the researcher will, for simplification and precision, adopt the term NGOs. The study focuses on NGOs that deal particularly with the CSP and HIV prevention programmes within CoJ.

In South Africa, just as in other African states, NGOs have emerged as a third sector, to provide relief to the otherwise overstretched state. Choto et al. (2020) explain that NGOs are better positioned to strategically engage with communities in an all-encompassing, participatory, and consultative manner as compared to the bureaucratic state. Although still viewed with suspicion in some countries such as Zimbabwe, many African governments have realised the crucial role that NGOs play and have thus relaxed the suppressive and restrictive measures that they would have pursued, making the space conducive for the emergence and proliferation of many civil society organisations (Choto et al., 2020; Asuelime, 2017).

There seems to be a realisation by the government that the state and businesses alone cannot provide solutions to the development challenges affecting many South African communities, hence the need to involve a third sector, the NGOs. This researcher, through his work experience in the NGO sector as well as interaction with different government players, can also testify to this paradigm shift on the part of the government. NGOs complement government efforts as far as developmental issues are concerned and this has led to what Mazibuko (2013, p. 3) refers to as “a distinction without a difference” when making a comparison between NGOs and the state. The author even questions the conceptual positioning of NGOs away from the state, as there are a lot of complementarities in the work that both do in delivering health and development services, particularly in marginalised communities. Regarding efforts to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa, it may be argued that the relationship between government and NGOs “is not of inherent conflict but widespread cooperation and mutual support” (Mazibuko, 2013, p. 4). There is agreement, engagement and consultation on policy choices, formulation, and implementation of topical societal challenges that include HIV/AIDS and persistent poverty.
2.10 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

NGOs have, to date, been very visible in several communities and have played a key role in efforts to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. The NGOs, such as HIVSA, have grown significantly and are contributing immensely towards community development through the rendering of both financial and technical support to many CBOs within the Gauteng Province. It can be observed that the NGOs have remained crucial in augmenting government efforts by leading in grassroots mobilisation; and creating awareness through the wide circulation of prevention and control information of HIV, TB, STIs and other communicable diseases. The NGOs also continue to do a lot of work in advocating and supporting health promotion programmes, supporting care and treatment services; strengthening community capacities; advancing volunteerism; and contributing to putting knowledge and evidence into practice (Asuelime, 2017). The NGOs have also been strategic in influencing policy, not just in the arena of HIV/AIDS but in other areas that include poverty alleviation, gender, and racial inequalities, to mention a few.

Important to note is that NGOs have been at the forefront of championing the adoption and implementation of the CSP. This is partly because some of these NGOs are funded by international aid agencies such as PEPFAR which have also been advocating for the adoption of the CSP approach. These NGOs have undertaken work with communities for extended periods and have witnessed both the successes and shortcomings of conventional social protection interventions due to the siloed approaches they use. The NGOs have therefore realised the importance of adopting the CSP strategy due to its potential in addressing HIV infection in youth. This study will focus on HIVSA and its partner CBOs, as HIVSA is one of the NGOs that has been very visible in the implementation of the CSP within CoJ’s Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm regions.

2.11 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Although some evidence exists that illustrated the potential of the CSP in East Africa, very little literature exists related to the context of South Africa. In addition,
the available literature is not clear on how combining economic strengthening and HIV prevention education protects the youths from HIV exposure and the practice of risky sexual behaviour. To address this gap in the literature, this study will assess the ways in which participating in the CSP changes the youths’ behaviour and practices. Contemporary literature does not demonstrate whether there are any synergistic economic benefits for youths in poor settings. This study will shed a distinct understanding of this gap and assumption by establishing and assessing the perceptions of youths regarding the economic empowerment benefits they might have derived from participating in the CSP.

This study also presents an opportunity to enrich and expand on new practice knowledge for social work practitioners. Through new insights on the CSP, the study will shift the paradigm toward new ways of programming for social workers as they strive to attain sustainable health and socio-economic empowerment opportunities for youths in marginalised communities.

2.12 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the importance of adopting the CSP in the prevention of HIV among vulnerable youths. Relevant literature on HIV trends among the youths globally and in the South African context was reviewed. There was also a discussion on the role of both central government and NGOs in addressing the HIV pandemic. It should be noted that the search for a robust and sustainable solution to eradicate the HIV pandemic has resulted in extensive studies on the matter. There is, therefore, abundant literature about HIV. Despite the availability of this myriad of literature as well as vast HIV intervention strategies, the prevalence of the pandemic and new infections among youths in South Africa remains a cause for trepidation. Simultaneously, the CSP (which is an essential HIV education and prevention intervention) remains under-researched. Consequently, this study aims to add value to better strategies for addressing the HIV pandemic among youths in poor communities. This will be achieved through exploring the experiences of the youths in some of these resource-constrained communities. The researcher assumes that if such a strategy can be adopted in marginalised South African communities, positive
results will be realised. In the next chapter, the Empowerment Theory, which constitutes this study’s theoretical framework, is discussed in detail.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely the Empowerment Theory. The discussion of the theoretical framework will shed light on the major pitfalls of traditional social protection and conventional HIV prevention approaches in curbing the spread of HIV infections among youths. It will be demonstrated that the use of the CSP as a more comprehensive multidimensional concept has the potential to build the youths’ socio-economic skills, as a result, empowering them with purpose and the ability to withstand factors that contribute to the adoption of risky behaviour and sexual practices. The chapter also explains how international instruments and South African policies and legislations give direction to the practice of the CSP.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study utilises the Empowerment Theory as a lens to understand the link between the CSP and the building of the youths’ capabilities to address HIV risks and vulnerabilities in resource-constrained settings. The Empowerment Theory is in congruence with the profession of social work’s core mandate of preventing, responding to, and reducing social ills through people’s empowerment.

There are different models and frameworks for empowerment that have been put across by various authors. According to Marhaeni (2019) the most notable frameworks include structural empowerment (ability to mobilize resources and achieve goals through access to information, support, resources, and opportunities); psychological empowerment (opportunity an individual has for autonomy, choice, responsibility, and participation in decision making in organizations); political empowerment (the process of transferring various elements of power such as resources, capabilities, and positions); community empowerment (the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives), and women empowerment (promoting women’s sense of self-worth, their ability to determine choices; their right to have access to
opportunities and resources. For this study, Zimmerman’s constructs of the Empowerment Theory have been preferred for their coherence, conceptual clarity, client context, and human agency within the environment. Further, Zimmerman’s Empowerment Theory is regarded as integratedness and has received considerable applause over the past decades for being broader and for transcending intrapersonal, behavioural, economic, political, social, environmental, and interactional components. Zimmerman’s Empowerment Theory has thus become a threshold framework in the field of social work, widely utilised as a guide to enhancing individuals and groups’ capacities to make choices and then to transform those choices into the sought after outcomes.

Youth empowerment has increasing importance for social work practice. As Richards-Schuster et al. (2018, p. 304) note “This age group bears the brunt of society’s fears, as well as the vicissitudes of social policies and programs.” This study is in the ambit of the practice of social work; thus, Zimmerman’s Empowerment Theory was preferred for the stage that it sets for programmes and policies to meaningfully empower young people to rally behind different issues and to engage actively in collective decision-making on community and social issues that affect their daily lives.

The Empowerment Theory, also referred to by Richards-Schuster et al. (2018, p. 308) as an “asset-based approach” prioritises the building of the youths’ agency, action, and engagement in change efforts. The theory focuses on the strengths that youths possess and is premised on a central belief that acknowledges that youths are champions and experts of their own lives and destinies, possessing unique perspectives that they need to usher to their communities (Richards-Schuster et al., 2018). All these tenets espouse and dovetail well with some of the basic principles of social work practice, such as self-determination, purposeful expression, and involvement.

This study delineates the context of the youths’ HIV vulnerability in resource-constrained settings in South Africa and focuses on the extent to which the CSP empowers and benefits the youths to make informed decisions on changing risky behaviour and sexual practices. Additionally, for this study, the Empowerment Theory will address the concern that youths in South Africa have very little aptitude to engage
in consequential roles in designing, informing, and improving programmes and policies meant to address their plight.

3.2.1 Youth empowerment and HIV prevention

The Empowerment Theory is noted to have been founded in 1981 by Julian Rappaport, a social scientist who postulated that people in poor and disadvantaged settings experience disempowerment, disenfranchisement, exclusion, and inequalities which lead to a lack of skills and inhibition of their sense of personal power to make sound decisions regarding their lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). In this sense, empowerment is viewed as “the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (UN, 2018, p. 11).

In concurrence with the view above, Marhaeni (2019, p. 555) adds that “empowerment is a process and purpose”. Marhaeni (2019, p. 555) further explains that:

As a process, empowerment is a series of activities to strengthen the power or empowerment of weak groups in society, including individuals who experience problems of poverty. As a goal, empowerment refers to the situation or outcome to be achieved by a social change

What is important to deduce from these views is the presupposition that an empowered group or individual has the information and knowledge to fulfil their economic aspirations, and social and health needs. In the case of youths in this study, empowerment is, therefore, an essential strategy in amplifying their roles, capacities, and life opportunities.

Importantly, Marhaeni (2019) states that to realise empowerment in all its dimensions, it is important for opportunities and interventions not to be understood or pursued separately, as empowerment is all-encompassing. In the context of this study, one might put forward that empowering youths goes beyond financial benefits as it also focuses on facilitating youths to a life marked by equality, prosperity, and health. The previous chapter highlighted that the undue neglect and disproportionate exclusion of the youths from the economic and health arenas is a key challenge in South Africa. To confront this incapacitation of the youths, the Empowerment Theory, therefore,
calls for the adoption and implementation of a broad spectrum of dynamic and multidimensional interventions that expand the assets, skills, knowledge, and capabilities of poor people to give them the control and personal ability to make and implement basic and strategic life decisions (Kabeer, 2001).

### 3.2.2 Empowerment and youth intervention programmes

According to Banks (2017) youths, particularly in Africa, are not empowered or capacitated to assume active and central processes of decision-making that have a significant effect on their well-being. Although Boadu and Isioma (2018, p. 2) caution that there should be no “one size fits all” approach to discussing or enacting what comprises youth empowerment, they are quick to point out that the answer to youth empowerment ingrained in engaging and embracing youths to take active roles in programme processes “which goes beyond the rhetoric”. Adding to these assertions, Banks (2017) remarks that despite the ample youth-oriented activities and projects done in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, most of the programmes have inconsequential results in stemming unemployment, dire poverty, and absence of empowerment due to their poor designs and failure to engage with the youths. Banks (2017, p. 439) indicates that it is important for youths to be empowered “to become active partners and not mere spectators in the programmes”.

Tanga and Tangwe (2014) note that the deficiency of empowerment in community programmes has an effect of preventing accountability as well as commitment on the part of intended beneficiaries. Similarly, Richards-Schuster et al. (2018) accuse the majority of youth programmes of failing to enact holistic structures to ensure youths empowerment. Boadu and Isioma (2018, p. 2) note that most of these youth initiatives are “sleep-walking” projects as they fail to properly analyse and target the unique priorities of youths. In the context of this study, and in concordance with the social work profession’s principles, the use of Empowerment Theory with youths is highly recommended as it sets the ground to shape their empowerment in the long term as active and engaged citizens.

The views espoused by the above-mentioned authors are in harmony with those shared by Abiodun et al. (2021) and Frame et al. (2016), who note that empowerment
is an essential factor to influence young people’s participation and inclusiveness in any social intervention programme. Abiodun et al. (2021) add that young people should be empowered to be development agents and to be champions of change as well as innovation. Waziri and Idris (2019) point out that it is important to empower youths through targeted training that will guide and enable them to pursue a wide range of opportunities for initiating behavioural change. Waziri and Idris (2019, p. 13) maintain that, only when they have been exposed to productive skills, and when they have proper psychological guidance, will the “youths be facilitated to cause changes in their lifestyle”. Expressed differently, it is only when youths are empowered that they will be able to transform their ideas into creativeness. Waziri and Idris (2019) caution that, if youths are cast on the margins of society, communities will remain impoverished and in the mess of diseases and ill health.

Informed of this background, this study deployed the Empowerment Theory to unpack the youths’ perceptions regarding the benefits of participating in the CSP. In their studies, Kerrigan et al. (2017) established that the use of Empowerment Theory in the community-based HIV prevention programmes addressed the socio-structural susceptibilities of participants to HIV acquisition and ensured comprehensive and unrestricted access to the interventions focused on prevention. As noted, the Empowerment Theory has an inherent potential to decrease or curb the exclusion problem, therefore this study made use of the theory to establish if the youths were engaged participants and not sheer onlookers in the programme by asking them to outline challenges and make recommendations on steps that could be pursued to strengthen the realisation of the intended outcomes of the CSP.

The Empowerment Theory shares many conceptual similarities with and borrows certain philosophies from related theories in the social realm, such as the Ecological Theory as well as the Capability Approach (Payne, 2005; Sadan, 2004). To this end, the Empowerment Theory is an enormously robust approach to understanding social change (Payne, 2005); notably, in the fight against HIV among youths who remain heavily affected by the pandemic in South Africa and other parts of the globe.

Since the Empowerment Theory also encompasses several philosophical concepts from the Capability Approach, it is vital to briefly explore the latter which conceptually
underpins the human development and health economics discourse (Karimi et al., 2016; Osmani, 2016). In 1980, Amartya Sen originated the Capability Approach and expanded it in his later works. Additionally, the concept of “capability” is central to this approach; it is the mixture of functioning and abilities available to individuals or groups and contributes to “enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make effective choices and translate these choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Karimi et al., 2016, p. 796). Thus, the Capability Approach, just like the Empowerment Theory, considers capabilities, social and economic assets, and skills as vital means in the journey of empowerment. What is noteworthy is that there is substantial convergence in the Capability Approach and the Empowerment Theory that economic growth performs a pivotal, but not entirely exclusive, function or role in youths development and well-being (Karimi et al., 2016).

It should be mentioned that there has been substantial debate on the applicability of the Capability Approach in certain human development issues. However, this study will not dwell on the debate regarding issues concerning the Capability Approach. Rather, the study will adopt the relevant components of the Capability Approach as a tributary that feeds into the main theoretical framework (Empowerment Theory) with an assumption that the high HIV infection rates among youths are an indication of the inability of current programmes to provide vulnerable youths with assets and capabilities that increase their socio-economic potential to limit HIV susceptibilities. Ginige and Richards (2012) point out that empowerment is about poverty reduction and giving people a new social meaning. This view is equally shared by Marhaeni (2019) and Abiodun et al. (2021), who assert that empowerment efforts should simply be measured by the extent to which people attain and enjoy commodities classified as basic needs that include food, health, housing, and employment.

As has been illustrated in the last chapter, the CSP is designed to deal with the social issues, economic exchanges and complexities that limit the effectiveness of youths HIV prevention programmes. It is fascinating to explore or study the extent to which the economic strengthening and HIV prevention education that is given to youths by the CSPs empowers them to address and disrupt the drivers, bottlenecks, risks, and vulnerabilities that perpetuate HIV infection. Simultaneously, it is equally essential to traverse how harnessing the capabilities (including their choices and freedoms) of the
youths as individuals, and their communities as a society, in HIV prevention contributes toward the attainment of healthy and sustainable communities.

3.2.3 Key principles of youth empowerment

Before discussing economic empowerment as a sub-construct of empowerment, it is crucial to examine the definition of empowerment that is given by Zimmerman (2000, p. 43). It reads:

*Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.*

This definition of empowerment is very critical in that it does not view the construct at an individual level only but “explicitly incorporates person-environment interaction” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 43). Lord and Hutchison (1993), who have written extensively to expand on Zimmerman’s work, posit that youth empowerment is about examining and building youths’ purpose action and commitment in efforts to change and improve their life situations. Lord and Hutchison (1993) add that the empowerment of youths relies on a primary belief that when sufficiently capacitated, youths can be experts and champions of their lives, with distinct perspectives and contributions for the benefit of their communities. As such, all empowerment programmes must focus on the strengths that young people possess to grow their self-efficacy, increase their critical consciousness, build their sense of personal responsibility, and enact change in their communities (Osmani, 2016).

In support of the assertions above Van Dyk (2012) pronounces that, techniques of empowering youths involve getting them to participate in community organisations, encouraging them to comprehend shared leadership by being part of collective decision-making, and guiding them to undertake collective action to gain access and expand opportunities to resources. This is in alignment with the assertion made by Zimmerman (2000) that empowerment, therefore, entails shared action to increase the quality of life led within communities as well as creating opportunities that enhance participation by all community members.
This study assumes that the CSP provides a platform that ensures both social and economic empowerment and involvement among the youths, which eventually enhances the youths’ involvement in choices that have an impact on their lives. In the context of HIV prevention, youths are empowered with both necessary HIV prevention education as well as the economic skills (and sometimes resources) that ensure that they stop practising risky behaviour and sexual practices by, for example, negotiating safer sex with their partners. This empowerment counters feelings of powerlessness, apathy, and despair, and promotes individual capabilities to implement basic life decisions (Tanga & Tangwe, 2014). When implemented within resource-constrained settings, the CSP becomes vitally important as it brings the missing link among the youths who are most affected by HIV infection.

Commenting on economic empowerment, Ginige and Richards (2012) note that it can be a pivotal lever and a critical trigger for transforming behaviour and improving health outcomes. This observation is supported by Sadan (2004), who adds that as one gains economic power, they move from a condition of powerlessness and transition to a state in which they have total control of their life. Simply put, economic empowerment signifies the ability to multiply possession of economic resources and exercise control over the resources or assets (Fewer et al., 2013). In other words, one is said to be empowered economically when they have both the capacity and skill to thrive economically, and the aptitude and commitment to act on their economic decisions or goals (Fewer et al., 2013).

Economic empowerment can be achieved by adopting various strategies that include but are not limited to entrepreneurship training, training on financial literacy, savings and asset building as well as cash transfers (Ginige & Richards, 2012). According to Fewer et al. (2013), six aspects are essential in contributing to the economic empowerment of youths. The factors are listed as i) financial or economic capital, ii) appropriate social norms, iii) human capital, iv) social networks, v) physical capital, and vi) connections to the right institutions. It should be observed that since young people in poor settings are assumed to be disadvantaged in many economic respects, the application of the Empowerment Theory in this study allows for the examination of
whether economic strengthening opportunities, which are combined with HIV education, trigger any shifts in behaviour and sexual decisions/practices for youths.

3.2.4 Youth empowerment and gender equity

In the realm of this study, paying attention to gender is very important when discussing the Empowerment Theory, since it has been established that harmful gender norms and gender entrenched inequalities are powerful causes and drivers for the disempowerment of youths, particularly females. This researcher also discusses gender because he notes that the CSP approach, under study here, has a large female profile. More so, there is an avalanche of studies that have established the contribution of gender to the worsening impact of HIV on female youths. As a reminder, in the year 2021, despite being only about 10% of the adult population, AGYW in the age category of 15 to 24 years contributed over 25% of new HIV cases (UNAIDS, 2021b). Violence and economic dependency are noted to make female youths particularly vulnerable to the sexual advances of older men. Across all settings and socio-economic groups, it is well known that daily, women go through their lives in the shadow of constant fear of the threat of GBV, whether it's sexual, emotional, physical, or psychological abuse.

Researchers such as Saul et al. (2018) aver that female youths encounter disparate circumstances and distinctive risks from their exceptional vulnerabilities that put them at the centre of poverty which gets passed from one generation to the next, discrimination, inequality and inhibited access to education and health services. As a solution, Soto et al. (2015, p. 3) propose that efforts to empower female youths should earnestly mainstream or “integrate female-faced strategies at all levels”. The Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) (2010) equally observes that youth empowerment should be jointly discussed with gender equity. PAHO (2010) expound that, if development with equality is to be achieved, the empowerment of female youths must be emphasised whenever youth policies and programmes are formulated and implemented.

Before focusing on some strategies that can be used to achieve economic empowerment for female youths, it is necessary to address a few terminological complexities. Firstly, the terms sex and gender have been used interchangeably - as
if they were one. While sex refers to the biological differences between men and women, gender refers to the sociocultural meaning attributed to those biological differences. Apart from being a social construct, gender should also be viewed as a relational concept that includes the distribution of power among men and women (PAHO, 2010). Other terms that need clarification are equity and equality. The two terms have also been confused by many. Equality refers to the concept of equivalence while equity implies impartial, fair, or just treatment. PAHO (2010, p. 23) gives clear definitions of equality and equity as follows:

**Gender equality in health** means that women and men have equal conditions for realising their full rights and potential to be healthy, contribute to health development, and benefit from the results.

**Gender equity** means fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, power, resources, and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognises that women and men have different needs, access to, and control over resources and that these differences should be addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes.

Adopting the Empowerment Theory, as well as exploiting its philosophical elements, is regarded as strategic in ensuring gender equity. This is so because “empowerment means the capacity to make one’s voice heard, to participate and to make choices” (PAHO, 2010, p. 26). PAHO (2010) adds that youth health programmes will not succeed if they do not reduce risk factors that breed gender disparities. By promulgating the fundamental tenet of inclusion, the Empowerment Theory, in congruence with the CSP, seeks to achieve equity in health amongst youths by identifying and addressing social determinants and economic factors that have a bearing on the health of the youth, whether female or male. This study hypothesises that NGOs that are implementing the CSP provide opportunities and an aiding environment for the participation of the youths, both female and male.

In a call to action for social work researchers, Richards-Schuster et al. (2018) focused the profession’s attention on the importance of viewing the youths as assets. The authors argue that equity in youth empowerment is built on a fundamental set of ideas of young people as “competent citizens” and “resources” to their communities.
(Richards-Schuster et al., 2018, p. 312). This premise by the Empowerment Theory links directly to social work’s strengths-based perspective that recognises the advantages that youths can bring to the table that is complementary to efforts by the government to solve the spread of HIV. It is, however, worthwhile to observe that in the social work profession, empowerment is not only about acknowledging the strengths that youths have but about imparting important cultural values and practices, such as working hard, self-sustenance, responsibility, and openness to guidance (Marhaeni, 2019).

A closer look at the objectives of the CSP shows that the programme strives to inspire similar values among youths, hence the appropriateness of Empowerment Theory in the study. The next section explains the international instruments and South African policies and legislation that influence the practice of the CSP.

3.3 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS INFLUENCING THE PRACTICE OF COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Several international instruments and treaties on youths, poverty and HIV exist, most of which are beyond the scope of this study. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNAIDS’ ambitious 95-95-95 treatment target are found by this study to be most relevant as they are noted to have hugely impacted the work of governments and NGOs pertaining to youth empowerment and HIV prevention. The following section discusses how the CSP is aligned with these two key international frameworks and strategies.

3.3.1 Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 to replace and continue with the aspects that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not achieve (Swain, 2018, p. 346). Described as thorough, inclusive, and people-centred, the SDGs have been labelled as “transformative” as their underlying aim is to eliminate poverty, launch and uphold socio-economic involvement and affirm the protection of the environment to realise sustainable global development (Swain, 2018). In the context of SDGs, sustainable development is defined as the capability of the present generations to fulfil their own needs without putting in jeopardy the chances of the
future generations to fully meet and satisfy their own needs (World Bank, 2018). Key in this definition is the importance of intergenerational equity, which means that current generations should not be selfish by conserving resources for future generations.

The UN (2018) notes that social protection is part of a comprehensive agenda of SDGs as the call to end extreme poverty entails that states and development agencies must implement relevant measures and systems of social protection that ensure that poor and vulnerable people have increased access to health, economic and social services. SDG 3 centres on good health and well-being, with the understanding that HIV/AIDS is a multifaceted problem. According to Swain (2018), SDG3 acknowledges the interdependent and mutually reinforcing links between HIV prevention and broader health and developmental pursuits by governments. Since sustainable development encourages prudent utilisation of resources with the view to spare and protect them for equal use by generations to come in future, the focus should be paid to the youths as the future of any nation is in their hands (Muchanyerei & Bila, 2017). Addressing HIV infection among the youths needs the application of high-impact interventions such as the CSP, an intervention that is deemed to empower youths so that they stay healthy and subsequently contribute toward the sustainable development of their communities.

3.3.2 United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS’ 95–95–95 targets and Fast-Track approach

UNAIDS launched the “95–95–95” targets and “Fast-Track” approach in 2014 driven by them to eradicate AIDS by the year 2030. The 95–95–95 targets, “are galvanising global action as they reflect a fundamental shift in the world’s approach to dealing with HIV” UNAIDS (2015b, p. 3). In this approach, UNAIDS calls for 95% of people who are infected with HIV to test and know their status, 95% of people with confirmed HIV-positive status to commence on ART and 95% of the people who are on ART to achieve undetectable levels of HIV.

The Fast-Track approach, on the other hand, is a call by UNAIDS for governments and development agencies to rapidly build and scale-up essential and effective prevention modalities and treatment approaches for HIV if the pandemic is to be outpaced (UNAIDS, 2015b). “Without scale-up, the AIDS pandemic will continue to
outrun the response, increasing the long-term need for HIV treatment and increasing future costs” (UNAIDS, 2015b, p. 5). Guided by six principles, namely ambition, focus, change, speed, saturation, and human rights, the Fast-Track approach focuses on 30 countries that are experiencing the highest HIV rates. South Africa is included in the 30 countries, with Johannesburg being listed as a UNAIDS Fast-Track city.

Of paramount importance is the fact that the 95–95–95 targets and Fast-Track approach have brought in the realisation among those fighting HIV/AIDS that other alternative opportunities and strategies for HIV prevention exist beyond medicines (UNAIDS, 2015b). This is so because the Fast-Track approach encourages the implementation of service delivery innovations and partnerships that have maximum potential impact. The targets and approach are built on reviewed and synthesised country data, which makes it easier for those fighting HIV to identify the population segments that are at the highest risk of being infected with HIV and to draw strategies for addressing challenges, and vulnerabilities.

It has already been put forward that, HIV prevention and mitigation programmes are profoundly enhanced when they are integrated with social and structural approaches (Mark et al., 2017; Cluver et al., 2016a). The adoption of programmes such as the CSP to reduce HIV infection, especially among the youths is therefore on the increase. To enrich the programmes, research needs to be conducted regarding the experiences of those participating in such programmes to inform policy. Considering the 95–95–95 targets and Fast-Track approach described above and the consideration that this research study was undertaken in Johannesburg, this study became very significant and relevant as it explored the experiences of youths participating in the CSP within a UNAIDS Fast-Track city. The results from the study offer a crucial understanding regarding the implementation of the CSP in the context of UNAIDS’s 95–95–95 targets and Fast-Track approach.

3.4 SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION AND POLICIES GIVING DIRECTION TO THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

South Africa has a complex political history, with the legacies of apartheid still viewed as looming large and intertwined in many complex ways that affect the country’s ability
to deliver pro-poor services and programmes. Tanser et al. (2018) note that not only does the political history impact the country’s policies and legislation directed at HIV and AIDS, but it also affects efforts to resolve other broader issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality. It is therefore prudent to provide a brief background and context to South African history before delving into specific legislation and policies that influence the practice of the CSP.

3.4.1 History and context of South African legislation and policies in response to HIV/AIDS

South Africa attained its democracy in the year 1994 with the new government, now led by the African National Congress (ANC), inheriting a discriminatory health care system that was significantly shaped and fragmented by the predominant apartheid system characterised “by racial inequalities, discrimination and segregation as well as almost a decade of inaction with regards to AIDS” (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC], 2006, p. 74). Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019) observe that the unequal distribution of resources that is unequal and inefficient in the healthcare model or system that South Africa continues to experience, which mainly affects poor communities, is because of the apartheid legacy.

SAHRC (2006) argues that another aspect that has had lingering effects on the country’s efforts to curb the increase in HIV is that the pre- and post-1994 political leaders shared a conservative paradigm regarding open discussion on issues of sexuality, STIs, and male power. Although the newly formed government emphasised transformation, seeking fundamental moves away from racism, autocracy, poverty, inequality, and a discriminatory health system from 1994 to 1999, Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019) note that the progress has been quite slow and deficiencies and inadequacies have persisted leading to the proliferation of diseases, chief among them the HIV pandemic.

In terms of addressing HIV, the ANC government developed a formidable strategy in 1992, at least on paper (SAHRC, 2006). Regrettably, numerous factors converged to hinder the smooth implementation of the national AIDS blueprint. According to Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019), these factors include a lack of both the economic and
human resources to fully implement the plan, as well as the social realities characteristic of running a government, such as bureaucracy, red tape, and corruption. The fight against HIV and AIDS has further been undermined by a radical shift from a biomedical perspective against the pandemic that emphasised ART to a more nationalist and rehabilitative approach focused more on alleviation of poverty, home-based care, nutritional remedies, and reliance on some traditional medicine (SAHRC, 2006). The nationalist approach during former President Thabo Mbeki’s administration (1999–2008) was premised on the view that HIV alone does not cause AIDS but that other factors such as poverty played a more influential role in causing AIDS. Sebola (2014, p. 33) notes that, as a result, “Thabo Mbeki’s era of office concerning research and HIV/AIDS policy is but remembered as an era of government’s unscientific, neglect, irresponsibility and denialism that caused the country unnecessary death rates that could have been avoided". It is estimated that Mbeki’s HIV/AIDS denialism (thus not allowing ART) led to 330 000 deaths (Simelela, 2014). It is outside the scope of this study to debate this issue in detail. Authors such as Simelela (2014) have critiqued and discussed the poor response of the government to the pandemic during this period. Furthermore, national AIDS policies in the first decade of democracy are well documented. On a positive note, recent policies show more collaboration between the civil sector and government. The collaborations are also an indication of the zeal and commitment that many stakeholders possess in their efforts to fight the pandemic (Simelela, 2014).

Although South Africa, to date, has made some progress in managing HIV/AIDS’ devastating effects, with about 68.4 people of the 7.7 million that are estimated to be living with HIV being on ART (van Schalkwyk et al., 2021). Cited as having the biggest ART programme on the globe, South Africa is also commended for having made steady gains in PMTCT (Akulliana et al., 2021). Simelela (2014) suggests that the steady progress has been enabled by a shift in public health policy, particularly regarding HIV and AIDS, especially with President Mbeki’s departure from office in 2008. Akulliana et al. (2021) and van Schalkwyk et al. (2021) caution that there is a need for South Africa to introduce robust, best-practice and multi-sectoral mechanisms to ensure that its public health legislation and policies are implemented. The authors call for coordinated responses that are effective in addressing critical blockages such
as poverty, unemployment, and gender violence, which increase the vulnerability of individuals in marginalised communities.

Currently, South Africa’s domestic response to HIV is coordinated and spearheaded by the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), which, together with other partners that include the HSRC, the country’s statutory research agency and think tanks, conduct surveys. The results are publicised to gauge the HIV pandemic in the country. There are several blueprints at district, provincial and national levels of government that are designed to outline the country’s HIV and AIDS policy. Notably, these include:

- The South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 (the Constitution) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996);
- National Development Plan (NDP);
- Integrated Services Delivery Model (ISDM);
- NYP;
- National Strategic Plan (NSP) for HIV, TB (tuberculosis) and STIs; and
- Provincial Strategic Implementation Plans.

In the following section, the researcher discusses how these legislations, frameworks and policies inform the practice of systemic and multi-faceted interventions used in the CSP.

3.4.2 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

South Africa’s Constitution (RSA, 1996) is the supreme institutional instrument that directs the application of South African policies. It is the ultimate law of the country and any “law or conduct inconsistent with it is invalid, and the obligations imposed by it must be fulfilled” (RSA, 1996, p. 1243). The Bill of Rights, which is spelt out in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, itemises the various socio-economic liberties and human rights that people are expected to enjoy in South Africa. Section 28 of the Constitution calls for numerous rights for children. These rights include the right to be cared for by parents and family, or to be placed in appropriate care should there be a need to remove the children from their primary family settings. The rights to nutrition, shelter, social services, and health are also outlined in the same section. Section 28(2) also
goes to length to explain the importance of the best interests of the child principle in pursuing and entrenching the well-being of children in communities.

Any policy and legislation derive their mandate in line with the Constitution. In the same vein, any strategy or programme aimed at addressing HIV infection in youths should also be in congruence with the Constitution. In South Africa, social protection is a human rights issue and a tool to enhance social justice, as the Bill of Rights outlines that all people are entitled to health, social security, water, and food (RSA, 1996). This is supported by the ILO (2017), which views social protection as an essential component of human rights issues that should be unconditionally promoted and provided. The CSP thus strives to combat youth HIV infection while respecting and promoting constitutional entitlements such as empowerment, equality, and dignity.

By its very nature, the Constitution is an enabling legal framework that sets a transformation agenda for facilitating youth development and empowerment. Figure 3 is a hierarchal illustration of the legislation and policies, which are subject to the Constitution, giving direction to the advent and practice of the CSP in South Africa.

![Figure 3: South African policies and legislations](image)

*Source: Researcher’s construction*

Authored by the Ministry for Welfare and Population Development (1997), the White Paper for Social Welfare is the first overarching policy on social welfare born out of the South African Constitution which reaffirms the government’s dedication to securing the rights, freedoms and basic welfare of people whilst promoting their active citizen participation. The DSD (2006a, p. 2) observes that South Africa adopted the White Paper “with the intention to address issues of poverty and inequity and promote social development by integrating social interventions with economic development”. Patel et al. (2005) shares a comparable opinion; the White Paper emphasises the requirement for interventions that directly tackle the needs and challenges of youths if sustainable development is to be attained. The authors add that the White Paper is a blueprint and the first policy document that the government instituted in its call to systematise and professionalise youth development and empowerment work.

The White Paper also articulates the need to build and strengthen the capacities and skills of those charged with the responsibilities of providing youth empowerment at a community level. In alignment, the CSP is a youth empowerment strategy that rallies all relevant government departments and non-governmental partners to work together in designing and carrying out successful projects aimed at including young people in the mainstream economy, to address their HIV risks and vulnerabilities.

3.4.4 National Development Plan (Vision 2030)

In 2012 and 2013, the ANC and the South African Government adopted the NDP that was compiled by the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012). According to Zarenda (2013), the NDP is earmarked as a central launch-pad guiding future strategies of economic and socio-development of the country, offering the principal goals and objectives for what needs to be attained by the year 2030. The NDP calls for urgency in the introduction and scaling up of systematic, rigorous, and innovative approaches in addressing intractable problems that are affecting and contributing to youth unemployment. According to Zarenda (2013), the NDP rightfully observes that, if left unchanged, the unemployment situation will worsen the exclusion experiences among youths and will also intensify their frustration and heighten their impatience,
which might nurture the poverty cycle and thereby threaten the democratic gains of the country. Some authors, such as Hunter et al. (2021), argue that this has already begun as evidenced by the remarkable and violent acts of looting, vandalism and unrest that happened in Gauteng and KZN provinces in July 2021 which resulted in more than 340 people losing their lives, and property damage exceeding R50 billion.

It is thus fitting that the CSP acknowledges the unique and underpinning circumstances that reinforce the state of youth unemployment, which also inadvertently contribute to their poor health outcomes. Being a multi-pronged and participatory approach, the CSP acknowledges the role of economic transitions not only in building sustainable health programmes for youths but also in preserving peace and democracy in the country.

### 3.4.5 Integrated Services Delivery Model (2006)

Put together by the DSD (2006a), the ISDM is a framework for developmental social services delivery in the country. Lombard (2007, p. 297) highlights that the “people first” principle of Batho Pele is fully embedded in the ISDM, as the framework is anchored on the belief that individuals and societies are the masters and champions of their own lives and destinies, and therefore, they must always be consulted and provided with quality services. The ISDM further advocate that, as opposed to assisting the poor and needy with conventional handouts, it takes a step further to call for the empowerment of people and societies by advocating that they be taught to be self-reliant. The ISDM is also applauded for urging norms and standards to be set that will be used as the basis for the monitoring and tracking of the comprehensiveness, adeptness and value of services rendered in promoting service users’ self-reliance (Lombard, 2007).

DSD (2006a) asserts that, in acknowledgement of the importance of SDGs, the ISDM urges both government and non-government institutions to work in partnership in adopting a sustainable approach to delivering developmental services that integrate social projects with economic activities. Thus, a programme such as the CSP is key in advancing the purpose of ISDM; it strives to strengthen and support the abilities of youth to address the causes and consequences of poverty and vulnerability. Practitioners such as social workers, who are essential in rolling out integrated social
interventions such as the CSP, are also urged by the ISDM to engage in holistic needs analysis and planning processes to provide comprehensive, efficient, and effective developmental and empowering services. It is observed that this encouragement by ISDM is in alignment with the Empowerment Theory and the CSP, which primarily calls for the establishment and scale-up of opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development for disadvantaged youths.

3.4.6 National Youth Policy (2020-2030)

The NYP (2020–2030), authored by the DWYPD (2021), outlines the context and framework for the government’s actions in addressing youth issues, proposing a comprehensive and holistic developmental strategy for youths. Additionally, the policy explains the importance of the ideals of redress, equity, and responsiveness in addressing the needs of youths. The policy further calls for mainstreaming of youth participatory approaches that are transparent, accessible, and sensitive to gender inclusivity.

The Helen Suzman Foundation (2014) notes that the NYP places common emphasis on the need for employment, the facilitation of entrepreneurship skills and opportunities for all disadvantaged youth. The NYDA is the primary unitary agency that is mandated by the government through the National Youth Development Agency Act (no. 54 of 2008) to spearhead the NYP objectives by developing and implementing integrated youth development programmes and strategies.

The Helen Suzman Foundation (2014) bemoans the inherent weakness of policies and current programmes to deliver crucial quality-of-life aspects for youths, especially in the pillars of health, economic participation, and education. In agreement, the DWYPD (2021) identifies unemployment, inadequate education, HIV and AIDS, and poor economic participation in mainstream economic activities as major challenges facing youths. Interestingly, the CSP similarly acknowledges these factors as the main impediments to health and empowerment for South African youths from poor settings.

For that reason, economic strengthening interventions that are part of combination prevention approaches aim to improve the socio-economic lives of the youth (FHI 360, 2021; Swann, 2018). There is thus compatibility between the goals and objectives of the NYP and the CSP. This study navigates this nexus by exploring the experiences
of youths participating in the CSP in resource-constrained settings and selected HIV hotspots of the CoJ.

3.4.7 National Strategic Plan

South Africa’s NSP is often described as the strategic guide to the country’s HIV, STI and TB response for the years 2017-2022, with periodic reviews and adjustments happening in-between for relevance and effectiveness. The NSP is overseen by SANAC, the country’s national body that was set up to offer technical advice on HIV, TB and STIs to the government. SANAC (2019) highlights that the NSP is in congruence with the general development intentions of the government and its founding is set in the Constitution. The NSP aims to inform, coordinate, monitor and give strategic vision and leadership on efforts directed at addressing the HIV and TB pandemics at different community levels. The key strategic goals of the NSP incorporate focusing on social factors and established structural constraints that amplify susceptibility to infection by HIV, STIs and TB. To an extent, the NSP also outlines the roadmap for prevention efforts to the goals and objectives of the NDP by advocating for a sustainable response to HIV. It must be overseen by responsible leadership that can mobilise resources and cultivate shared accountability whilst reaching and serving all people at risk with targeted interventions that are suitably customised to meet their needs.

It should be observed that the NSP cites marginalisation and abject poverty as key drivers of food insufficiency and poor health, which have direct links to the acquisition of HIV and TB. Additionally, the NSP calls for combination prevention approaches that mix evidence-informed biomedical, socio-economic, and behavioural change strategies to attain the utmost results in HIV prevention and mitigation work (SANAC, 2019). The above-stated goal of the NSP aligns very well with that of the CSP. The envisioned goal of the CSP is to move towards the achievement of zero new cases of HIV infection in South Africa, in alignment with UNAIDS’ 95–95–95 HIV prevention strategy, by strengthening ideas and programmes that add to the increase and expansion of health knowledge for communities, with specificity on youths.
3.4.7.1 Gauteng Strategic Implementation Plan for HIV, TB and STIs for 2017 to 2022

This plan, which flows from the NSP, represents Gauteng Province’s cross-sectoral approach to addressing HIV, TB and STIs. Put forward by the Gauteng AIDS Council (GAC) (2017), the plan recognises the rise in HIV prevalence among youths and thus prioritises HIV prevention among youths with special attention to female youths. This provincial multi-sector plan, therefore, tackles the medical factors and known socio-cultural and economic issues that propel the spread of HIV among youths. In the plan, provincial leadership pledges to understand the gender disparities that exist between males and females and that females bear the most effects of poverty, exploitation, abuse, and inequality. The goals of the plan (which include the provision of education and life skills development for youths) speak directly to the components of the CSP that this study aimed to explore. Since the study was conducted in Gauteng Province, this strategic implementation plan became vital and relevant.

3.4.8 Challenges and constraints of the legislation and policy

It has been argued in several academic circles that many governments, particularly in the developing world, are good at developing ‘juicy’ policies but very poor at implementing those policies. South Africa is no exception, as Tebele (2016, p. 1) argues that “South Africa has excellent and well-written legislation and policies; however, the problem with South Africa’s public policies is that they habitually yield poor implementation results”. In agreement, Bond (2014, p. 2) also observes that the incapability and excruciatingly slow progress by the government to implement its policies and programmes results in “unacceptable service delivery backlogs and problems which can threaten internal peace, stability and the sustainability of constitutional democracy”.

Another most significant challenge, especially in the context of this study, was identified by Howie and Stevick (2014, p. 582); most policies and legislation never succeed because “separated from practices” as they are drafted and implemented “in complete isolation”. This contention is backed by Mkhize (2015, p. 193) who expounds that the disjointedness of the policies results in systematic problems which make it
difficult for the public, particularly the poor, to be consulted and to participate in policy choices. Howie and Stevick (2014) also encourage African governments not just to “uproot” policies and legislations in the Western world, as they will not fit or appropriately respond to the actual situation prevailing in African poor settings.

The other key challenges and constraints that are discussed as contributing to the failure to effectively implement legislation and policies in South Africa (as identified by Mkhize, 2015 and Bond, 2014) are the lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and expertise by those charged with implementation; poor resourcing; rampant financial mismanagement and corruption; and the lack of consultation of the public which leads to poor participation. Mkhize (2015, p. 193) discusses another issue, namely that many of the policies seem to describe the “what”, but do not explain the “how”. In support of this point, Tebele (2016) cites the NDP as an example of a well-thought-through policy created to stamp out socio-economic risk factors afflicting the country but notes that NDP falls short of presenting any tangible or practical course of action as to how to the government will go about implementing the policy. Tebele (2016) explains further that the only thing that the NDP does well is to articulate the goals that it hopes to attain, the projected period that it should take and to give a description of the stakeholders.

As spelt out in the legislation and policies discussed above, the South African Government realises the role of poverty and marginalisation in not only enhancing vulnerability to HIV but also reducing people’s capabilities to acquire coping mechanisms that are safe and effective in handling the pandemic. In recent years, the government has admitted that it is failing on its mandate to implement policies earnestly in a manner that will benefit the youths and the poor. As an example, President Cyril Ramaphosa conceded on the 10th of February 2022 during the State of the Nation Address that the unemployment rate in the country had reached its highest recorded level and the gap between those that have and those that do not have has worsened (South African Government, 2022). He went on to acknowledge that the “deep” and “structural” factors that are perpetuating social inequality, exclusion, poverty, unemployment, and disease needed to be confronted by actions rather than words (South African Government, 2022).
The president’s admission comes in the face of mounting evidence that shows that the government has somehow, wittingly, or otherwise, failed to competently manage the structural and systemic factors that drive HIV, such as underdevelopment and inequalities. In addition, the majority government is still struggling to keep its promise to deliver accessible health and education for all, as well as eradicate poverty and gender inequality. Whereas the president can be applauded for the open admission of the failure of his government to effectively implement policies, caution should also be sounded that if plans being instituted are not accompanied by game-changing interventions that address the structural factors, all will be in vain.

With specificity to youths, one would concur with observations made by other researchers, such as Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019); that South Africa has sound policies on HIV/AIDS, youths unemployment, poverty reduction and community and social development in general. The main problem is implementing those policies amid the deeply embedded problems of corruption, bureaucracy, and inequalities. This submission is backed by Zarenda (2013) who equally notes that, despite at least officially showing concern regarding improving youth circumstances, the actual implementation of policies by the South African Government remains lacking. Zarenda (2013) adds that there has been no substantial improvement in the lives of most young people in the country more than two decades after the attainment of democracy. While acknowledging the progress made thus far in terms of fighting new infections among youth, UNAIDS (2018) advocates for strong shared responsibilities between governments and other stakeholders in ensuring that policies are diligently implemented to answer to the health and social demands emanating from poor communities.

3.5 SUMMARY

Empowerment Theory has been discussed in detail in this chapter, as it is the theoretical framework that the study adopted. It explored how the theory explains and interprets various aspects and principles of youth empowerment concerning economic strengthening, HIV prevention and gender equity. Furthermore, the chapter focused on the various social and economic assets that youths can accumulate from participating in the CSP, which are critical for the youths to empower themselves and
enhance their capacities to make effective choices. Lastly, the chapter explored the relevant international instruments and local legislation and policies that have shaped the evolvement and practice of the CSP. The research methodology that was used to carry out this study is presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter traverses the methodology utilised in this study. In the previous chapter, the Empowerment Theory was discussed in detail as the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The essentiality of adopting the CSP in the prevention of HIV among vulnerable youths was also argued. A comprehensive literature review was given to corroborate the argument. This chapter subsequently builds from the previous chapter by detailing both the philosophical assumptions that constitute valid research, as well as the methodological strategies that buttress this study. As alluded to in Chapter 1, the goal of this study was to explore the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention with a focus on resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa. To achieve this goal, and to provide more insight into the problem, a qualitative research study was conducted by obtaining information on the ideas, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, knowledge, and experiences of the research participants on the research topic.

The following sections contain detailed descriptions of the research paradigm, approach, design, sampling, data collection methods and data analysis. In addition, the sections discuss the trustworthiness of data and ethical considerations of the study. The work of Creswell and Creswell (2018) is predominantly cited for its currency and originality and the reasons that it provides a thorough, compact, clear, and easy-to-follow overview on the steps to follow when conducting research.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Many writers on research agree that identifying a research paradigm for a study is challenging yet remains a cardinal component of the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Bryman, 2012; De Vos & Strydom, 2011). This is so because individuals have different views, beliefs, and interpretations of how the world functions. Furthermore, different writers also use different terms for research paradigms. For instance, Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 5) prefer to use the term “worldviews” instead of paradigms. Others, such as Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) maintain the term ‘paradigm’. This study also adopts the term research paradigm to
mean “the conceptual lens through which the researchers examine the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 26). The research paradigm defines a researcher’s philosophical inclination, or as Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe it, their set of beliefs, patterns or worldviews that guide an investigation.

Thomas Kuhn is usually credited for bringing an impact on the use of the term paradigm in social sciences (De Vos & Strydom, 2011). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm has four elements, namely epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. Epistemology, as stated by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), focuses on the nature and comprehension of human knowledge that a researcher can acquire and extend in their field of research. Ontology, according to the same authors, is concerned with assumptions considered as objective that individuals make to believe that something is real or makes sense. These philosophical assumptions are important in guiding the researcher to make meaning of the gathered data. Methodology refers to the practical research processes and procedures that the researcher follows to gather and report the data that they believe should be known. Lastly, axiology refers to the ethical issues and values pertinent in planning a research study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) identify four dominant research paradigms in social sciences. The first is the positivist paradigm, which usually applies quantitative research methods such as experiments for data gathering. The second is the critical or transformative paradigm, which primarily focuses on socio-political and economic issues. The third paradigm is the pragmatic paradigm, which advocates for pluralistic approaches and a combination of methods to understand participants' behaviour and beliefs.

This study adopted the fourth paradigm, namely the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was primarily chosen for its relevance in qualitative research. The research paradigm acknowledges the subjective nature of human experience and endeavours “to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the context” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). In this regard, the ontological viewpoint is that reality can only be known by those who experience it, hence the youths
participating in the CSP as well as the key informants. The epistemological stance is that social reality is best understood by the participants’ voices, as they are the actors in their daily worlds and are therefore most able to deliver their truths with sufficient depth and detail. These philosophical orientations were crucial in framing both the axiology and methodology for the study, for example, formulating and answering the research questions and research goal, and selecting research methods, approaches, and designs.

4.3 TYPES OF RESEARCH

A research study can either be basic or applied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Surbhi (2017), basic research (sometimes referred to as pure research) usually focuses on advancing scientific knowledge to fully understand a certain topic or natural phenomenon. It deals with the generalisation and formulation of theory about behaviour and focuses on collecting information that has universal applicability. Thus, both basic and pure researchers are driven by curiosity and the desire to provide an understanding of social reality by developing theory and increasing or expanding the knowledge base (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). Applied research, on the other hand (as noted by Surbhi, 2017), is aligned toward providing a solution to specific practical problems and real-life situations. In this regard, applied researchers apply and tailor the knowledge to address specific practical issues. Based on this assertion, this study is an applied research study that develops or expands the knowledge base to address specific practical issues in the field of HIV. This study, therefore, stimulates thought and action in practice as aptly suggested by Fouché and De Vos (2011). The knowledge generated from this study is intended to improve how the CSP is practised in Gauteng Province and across South Africa. This will, in turn, assist implementers and other stakeholders in the prevention of HIV infection among the youths, a problem that persists - especially in resource-constrained settings.

4.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach is a process of steps used to collect and analyse information to increase the researcher's understanding of a topic or issue. The research approach consists of three steps, namely posing a question, collecting data to answer the
question, and presenting an answer to the question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Two main research approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative research, have been used over the years. The two approaches differ in several ways but most obviously quantitative research deals with numbers whereas qualitative research is more concerned with words (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative research is based on the analysis of causal relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yates, 2004; Taylor, 2000). On the other hand, qualitative research focuses on “understanding the process and the social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioural patterns”, and the emphasis is on the quality and depth of information (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 83). A third research approach which combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods, known as the mixed methods approach, has also been gaining momentum recently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2012; De Vos & Strydom, 2011; Alpaslan, 2010; Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007). In this study, the constructs of the qualitative approach, which are descriptive and exploratory, were considered as best suited to the topic under investigation.

Qualitative research refers to research about peoples' lives and experiences, as it elicits “soft data” on their behaviours, emotions, and sentiments (Fouché & Delport, 2011, p. 65). Thus, a qualitative approach was found suitable for this study as it allowed youths, NGO practitioners and government officials to explore and describe their feelings, perceptions, and meanings of the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programmes in resource-constrained settings. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that qualitative research methods suit the social work discipline since the primary task of social work is to catalyse social change amongst individuals, groups, organisations, and communities. This change may only be brought about by probing, listening to, and understanding the views and experiences of clients and communities (Barusch et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Hence, the goodness of fit between the qualitative research approach and the social work discipline is rightly observed by Padgett (2008).

Applying a qualitative approach in the study had two advantages, namely creating an opportunity to ask open-ended questions, and allowing the researcher to probe. The open-ended questions allowed for in-depth exploration of issues under probe as participants were given the opportunity and freedom to answer the open-ended
questions in detail in line with Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) proposition. Participants were able to talk through issues and even raised matters in areas that were unknown to the researcher. The other advantage was the continuous opportunity to probe for more detailed input and allow flexibility in the research process (Fouché & Delport, 2011; Padgett, 2008; Welman et al., 2005). This absence of rigidity allowed for the attainment of more information, even on additional subjects and issues that were raised by participants during the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The disadvantages of the qualitative approach are that it relies on what people say; some responses tend to be very subjective and because the responses might be true for the context, they cannot be generalised to a larger population (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Fouché & Delport, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In addition, the researcher must guard against, and know participants might give socially desirable answers during the research process (Fouché & Delport, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that the art of effective and meaningful data gathering is to be aware of the limitations and strengths of each approach. In this study, these shortcomings were countered by asking the “how” and “why” questions. These questions were hugely informative, removed bias and allowed for quick adaptation of questions, change of setting and any other variables to improve responses, as encouraged by Ngulube (2015, p. 47). Furthermore, methodological triangulation, wherein one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were used, proved useful in minimising some of the said limitations.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a comprehensive plan or blueprint for empirical research aimed at answering the who, what, where, when, why, and how questions of any study investigation (Almalki, 2016; Bhattacherjee, 2012). It presents a clear, feasible and flexible plan with concrete and specific details to conduct the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In developing a research design, one is guided by the research question as well as the kind of evidence required to address this question. There are different but sometimes overlapping types of alternative research designs within the qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fouché & Schurink, 2011).
These are the narrative approach, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study.

Fouché and Schurink (2011) identify three types of case study, namely descriptive or intrinsic case study, explanatory or instrumental case study, and collective case study. However, Fouché and Schurink (2011) admit and caution about the quandary of sticking to one specific type of case study, as these designs often overlap. Whilst being mindful of this, the collective case study design was selected as the most appropriate for this study for the reasons stated by Crowe et al. (2011); it allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings. More so, and in line with the views of Creswell and Creswell (2018) (that a collective case study research design allows for meaningful interpretation of multiple perspectives in a study), the interest in this study was not limited to the individual perceptions of the youths but on their collective experiences.

Collective case study is regarded by Yin (2018), as a process that involves studying multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially to generate a still broader appreciation of a particular issue. It is important to distinguish between case report designs seen in medical research and collective and collective case study that was deployed in this study. According to Alpi and Evans (2019), in medical research, case report designs are familiar ways of sharing events or efforts of intervening with single patients with previously unreported features; whereas collective case study research encompasses a great deal more complexity than a typical case report and often incorporates multiple streams of data combined in creative ways.

The collective case study research design best suited this study because the study aimed to gain an understanding of the views of youths, NGO practitioners and government officials on the experiences of youths participating in the CSP within NGOs in poor communities of the CoJ. According to Yin (2018), rigor in collective case studies can be improved by making provision for comparative or multiple sources of data. Obtaining data from youths, NGO practitioners and government officials, either through interviews or focus group discussions, therefore became a mechanism or tool for synthesizing information across the three groups which increased the study unit of analysis thereby enriching the study findings. Figure 4 visualises some of the benefits of collective case study design.
Using semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants, the researcher played the role of a conduit in describing participants' realities as opposed to being an expert in the area being studied. This augurs well with the observation by Yin (2014, p. 75), that collective case studies are best used in studies where the researcher poses “how” or “why” questions, has little control over the events, and the focus is on contemporary phenomena within a real-life context. The collective case study design utilised in this study was in alignment with the social work empowerment agenda, as the collective case study allowed for interaction, holistic understanding and thorough analysis of persons, groups, episodes, processes, and communities to proffer long-term solutions for the most vulnerable population segments in society (Kaseke, 2015).

Since this study sought to give prominence to the experiences of youths participating in the CSP in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province, and based on the researcher’s ontological and epistemological standpoints, it was necessary to explore the youths’ experiences by asking ‘what’ questions (see Appendix 7: Semi-structured in-depth interview guide). Asking the ‘what’ questions reduced the risk of being pre-emptive and enhanced exploration, as recommended by Bryman (2012). For example, conversational questions were generated around the interview themes, such as What are your perceived benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV
prevention education? This provided the opportunity for the youths to share their experiences and realities as the primary actors in the CSP. Following the responses obtained, the researcher delved into their experiences by asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, such as “in what way(s) has your participation” in the CSP changed your behaviour and sexual practices? Furthermore, the probing questions that were used guided and enriched the interview in line with the objectives of the study, hence the “real life context” fitting in with Yin’s (2014, p. 79) basic constructs of case studies.

The collective case study design has been criticised in some quarters on two main grounds, firstly, the casing lacks scientific rigour, and secondly the problem of generalisability. Noteworthy is that this criticism has not been directed at the collective case study design per se but qualitative research as an approach to empirical enquiry. However, authors such as Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Stake (1995), for example, defend the use of the qualitative collective case study design by stating that the purpose of collective case study research is not generalisation but rather particularisation. Collective case study research aims to gain greater insight and understanding of a specific case, situation, or phenomenon. Cognisant of these criticisms but in line with Yin’s (2014) advice, the researcher continuously monitored all interpretations and eliminated biased views to enhance the quality of the study. Admittedly, the collective case study design has the potential of being time-consuming and labour-intensive. To overcome this challenge, the researcher sought the support of a research assistant who was trained and given an orientation before data collection.

4.6 AREA OF STUDY

The study was conducted in South Africa’s Gauteng Province, in CoJ MM. South Africa has nine administrative provinces and Gauteng Province is considered the country’s economic hub (Stats SA, 2022). The province has the largest share of the South African population. According to Stats SA (2022) approximately 16,10 million people reside in Gauteng Province, which comprises about 26,6% of the national population, currently pegged at 60,60 million. Stats SA (2022) further highlights that due to its larger population size, Gauteng Province achieved the largest inflow of migrants of approximately 1 443 978 for the period 2021–2022. This trend is predicted to be maintained (Stats SA, 2022). This acceleration in migration brings both benefits and
challenges. As previously indicated, Gauteng and KZN provinces constitute the highest number of people living with HIV in the country. Factors such as rampant poverty, inequality, unemployment, as well as unprecedented scales of migration (including inter-country migration), have been identified as some of the main causes of this high HIV prevalence in the country in general and in the said provinces.

The non-probability, or judgment sampling techniques of the purposive approach were used to deliberately select Gauteng Province as the study setting because the province is the forebearer in implementing CSP and thus was better positioned to provide crucial information that might not have been obtained so well through other provinces. The typical site-sampling strategy was then applied to select the NGOs in Gauteng which are implementing the CSP and HIV prevention programme. According to Patton (2002, p. 236), typical site-sampling strategy suggests that ‘the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual’. Considering that the NGOs are all typical in that they are implementing CSP in the same setting, this strategy was therefore adopted.

The CoJ MM’s Soweto (Region D), Alexandra (Region E) and Orange Farm (Region G) were selected for this study. These regions have been identified as major contributors to CoJ, having the second largest number of HIV infections and the largest number of AIDS-related deaths, after KZN (Stats SA, 2022). In addition, these regions are HIV hotspots, especially among youths aged 15 to 24 (Dwyer-Lindgren et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2016). This may be attributed to several structural and environmental factors that constitute youth vulnerability, which include but are not limited to poverty and lack of economic empowerment. In this regard, NGOs are implementing the CSP in these resource-constrained settings to address the underlying behavioural and structural vulnerabilities which expose youths in these areas to a greater risk of HIV infection. Hence, this study focused on the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programmes within these disadvantaged settings.
4.7 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This section presents the population of the study. It also describes the sample for the study and explains and justifies how the sample was selected.

4.7.1 Population of the study

A population is a totality of persons, events, organisation units, case records, or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned (Nyumba et al., 2018). De Vos and Strydom (2011) define a population as a collection of items of research interest; the population represents a group from which one wishes to generalise the
research. Populations are often defined in terms of demography, occupation, time, and care requirements. When conceptualising a research study, it becomes necessary to identify the population with which the inquiry will be undertaken (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). There were four population groups in this study:

i. All the youths aged 15 to 24 years who were participating in the CSP within NGOs in the regions of Soweto, Alexandra and Orange Farm in CoJ, Gauteng Province;

ii. All the NGOs that were implementing the CSP;

iii. NGO practitioners that were responsible for implementing the CSP; and

iv. All government officials from the DSD who were directly responsible for supporting NGOs implementing the CSP.

In this study, the population is reported in numbers, based on the six NGOs that were selected to form part of this study. A review of CSP attendance registers revealed that 132 youths and six practitioners were involved in the CSP at the six NGOs. Since it was not the intention of the qualitative study to collect data from the entire population but rather to describe and understand the experiences of youths participating in the CSP (which was the case being studied), a sample was selected, from whom the data was collected. The details of the sample follow for discussion.

4.7.2 Sample

A sample “comprises elements or a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study” (Strydom, 2011b, p. 223). Phrased differently, a sample is a (small) portion of the population from which a representative selection is made and information about the entire population can be obtained (Nyumba et al., 2018). Similarly, Strydom and Delport (2011) posit that data collected from the sample is seen to give an idea of what can be expected from the population, especially in qualitative studies where the sample consists of a few cases. In other words, selecting a sample of youths to participate in this study had to be representative of all youths’ experiences, pertaining to their participation in the CSP within the NGO sector. The size of the sample depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the study, their available time, and resources, and what is useful and credible (Almalki, 2016). In this
study, there were four sample sets, namely 30 youths, six NGO practitioners, six NGOs and five DSD (government) officials. The selection of the 30 youths was done by means of placing the names of all the 132 youths who met the main typical characteristics specified above into a box. After a shuffle, only 30 youths (18 female, 12 male) were subsequently selected randomly to participate in the study.

4.7.3 Sampling techniques

Just as there are two broad research approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative, there are also two broad types of sampling depending on the research approach selected. Quantitative research generally utilises probability, also termed random sampling (Strydom, 2011c). According to Strydom (2011b) and Bryman (2012), probability sampling entails that the researcher applies a random selection method that allows each unit in the population an equal or known chance of being selected.

Owing to the qualitative nature of the study, non-probability sampling was used in the study. This followed the inference by Strydom and Delport (2011, p. 2) that “in qualitative investigations, non-probability sampling is used almost without exception”. In non-probability sampling, a sample is not selected using a random selection method but, on the qualities or characteristics of the units based on the purpose of the inquiry. This means that some units in the population stand a greater chance of being selected than others.

Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to draw samples for youths, NGO practitioners, NGOs, and DSD government officials to participate in the study. Purposive or judgemental sampling involves the selection of participants based on the needs of the study and the judgement of the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016; Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Tongco, 2007). Due to the size of the population and the fact that the NGOs implementing the CSP are known to the researcher, and in alignment with the assertion by Strydom and Delport (2011) that purposive sampling enables the researcher to select a sample of relevant and information-rich participants, the researcher selected participants based on some defining characteristics that made them holders of the data needed for the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Tongco, 2007).
In line with the above position, criterion sampling (as part of the purposive sampling technique), was employed. This entails that at the design stage, the researcher decides the typical characteristics of participants that will be included in the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 80). The main typical characteristics of youths that were included in the study were that:

- They had to be youths, male or female, aged 15 to 24 years;
- They had to be participating in the CSP within NGOs in CoJ regions of Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm;
- They had to have at least a year’s experience participating in the CSP;
- They had to be willing to participate in the study; and
- They had to be available for the study.

The assistance of gatekeepers and workers from the selected NGOs was sought to provide names of the youths who met the above selection criteria. A contingent plan was put in place that, should any of the selected youths change their mind and be unwilling to participate or withdraw from the study, the researcher would have continued with random selection from the names in the box until he had gotten the 30 youths to participate in the study.

In addition, six NGO practitioners and five DSD government officials were requested to participate in focus group discussions due to their expert knowledge in the field of study. The non-probability, the purposive sampling method was also applied in the selection of these participants. As alluded to above, the NGO practitioners and DSD officials who were directly responsible for supporting the implementation of the CSP were known to the researcher.

There are disadvantages to the use of purposive sampling. In this regard, using purposive sampling can be subjective, resulting in the researcher unintentionally skipping other important participants or becoming biased unknowingly when selecting them (Etkan et al., 2016; Gray, 2009). Furthermore, the findings from a sample selected using purposive sampling are limited to the population that is studied (Etkan et al., 2016; Bernard, 2002). The criterion sampling technique of purposive sampling was highly preferable for this study, as the youths that participated in the CSP were already known. This means that criterion sampling, as observed by Etkan et al. (2016,
p. 2) allowed for “the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest”. The use of criterion sampling, therefore, provided the researcher with the justification to generalise from the sample.

4.7.4 Recruitment of Non-Governmental Organisations

The senior management of each NGO were contacted in writing to enter the research sites for recruitment purposes. This communication detailed the nature, purpose, and anticipated value of the study (see Appendix 6: Request to NGOs for permission to conduct research). This was followed by seeking written permission from the six NGOs. An offer to attend meetings with youth participating in the CSP was made to explain the details pertaining to participation in the study. Alongside building rapport and trust, these meetings allowed the youth to ask questions. The contents of the consent and assent forms (see Appendix 2: Consent form and Appendix 3: Assent form) were also discussed during the meetings, highlighting that participation was voluntary. Similarly, meetings were also held with NGO practitioners and DSD officials to explain the purpose of the study.

4.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The collection of data during qualitative research must be a rigorous process to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study. Methods used to collect data need to comply with ethical principles of research. The participants who volunteered to participate in the study were given a consent form to read and sign (see Appendix 2: Consent form). Noteworthy is the fact that data collection only commenced after obtaining the ethical clearance to conduct the study. In this study, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with youths and key informants to collect rich data which were analysed and interpreted in terms of specific themes and discussed concerning the objectives of the study.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in-depth interviews are the principal data collection method widely used in qualitative research. Interviews are a one-to-one method of detailed data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth (Hennink et al., 2011). According to Kvale (1996) as cited in Greeff (2011, p. 342), “qualitative interviews are defined as, attempts to
understand the world from the participant point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences and to uncover their lived world before scientific explanations”. The advantages of interviews are that they enable researchers to obtain large amounts of in-depth data quickly (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Bryman, 2012; Greeff, 2011). Interviews also allow researchers control over the questions as they can probe during the interview to ensure the collection of rich data, which the participants can provide about their experiences of past and present events (Bryman, 2012).

The disadvantage of interviews is that participants might not feel free to share their experiences and instead give socially desirable answers. They might also feel threatened because of face-to-face sessions conducted which may not warrant anonymity to the researcher or might scare them (Sarantakos, 2013; Babbie & Mouton, 2011). To counteract these shortcomings, appropriate interviewing skills were used during the individual interviews with the different participants to allow them to feel comfortable sharing their unique views and experiences about the CSP.

The study also used focus group discussions, which are defined by Greeff (2011, p. 360) as “group interviews”. They are called a focus group because the researcher keeps individuals in the group focused on the topic under discussion “in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Greeff, 2011, p. 361). Equally, Hennink et al. (2011) define a focus group discussion as an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focusing on a specific set of issues. This is done to ensure that any information that would have been missed during the one-on-one interviews is captured and discussed during the focus group discussions. Greeff (2011, p. 341) points out that “things that are not likely to emerge in the one-to-one interview are more likely to come out in focus groups because group dynamics can be a catalytic factor in bringing information to the fore”. The combination of both one-to-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, therefore, enabled issues to be discussed until saturation.

The selection of youths to participate in the focus groups was purposively done to select some youths who had participated in the one-on-one interviews for the two focus groups. NGO practitioners and DSD officials comprised a focus group of their own, respectively. Each focus group consisted of not more than seven participants. Nyumba et al. (2018) advise that deciding on the right number of participants means
striking a balance between having enough people to generate a discussion but not having too many people, which could cause some to feel crowded out.

The advantages of focus groups, as explained by Hennink et al. (2011), are that they are suitable for collecting data on real-life experiences, flexible, quick to produce results, and cheap to run. Focus groups also accommodate participants who are afraid of one-to-one interview sessions (Bryman, 2012). The disadvantages, as highlighted by the same author, are that the researcher should possess special skills to moderate the group, analysis of data might be cumbersome, and the group process may be affected if a conflict arises amongst participants. The other disadvantages are that other group members might influence participants and they might not feel free to share their experiences and may also give socially desirable answers (Nyumba et al., 2018; Bryman, 2012). To counteract these disadvantages, the researcher acted as the moderator and was assisted by a registered social worker who was responsible for notetaking, tape recording as well as observing certain group dynamics. Although prior training was offered to the research assistant, the assistant was up to the task as he had experience in research through his academic studies and work experience. The focus groups were held at the NGOs at venues that warranted privacy on dates and times that suited the participants.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The study used two different instruments, which are a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 7: Semi-structured interview guide) and a focus group discussion guide (see Appendix 8: Focus group discussion guide). A semi-structured interview guide comprised questions that were presented flexibly in such a way that participants could explore and explain issues in depth (Bryman, 2012; Greeff, 2011). The interview guides were designed using the English language because the structured curriculums of HIV prevention education and economic strengthening interventions that are used in the CSP are written and facilitated in English. Consequently, all youths participating in the programme are conversant with and competent in English. The advantage of the semi-structured interview guides was that they were not restrictive; they allowed participants to respond to questions asked and add additional relevant information in line with the observation by Gray (2009) and Patton (2002). The disadvantage was
that the collection of data through semi-structured interviews took a great deal of time as a lot of data was gathered. Any potentially useful data was recorded thoroughly, accurately, and systematically, using field notes, sketches, audiotapes, and other suitable means to avoid collecting inaccurate data that could compromise the results of the study and invalidate the results (Bryman, 2012).

The structure of the interview guide included an introduction, opening questions, key questions and closing questions. According to Greeff (2011), the need to organise themes into a logical order, and give due consideration to how participants may experience the questions in the interview setting, is significant in qualitative studies. Beginning with broader questions and tapering into more specific questions assisted in putting the participants at ease and further encouraged maximum conversation regarding their experiences with the CSP. Moderation skills, social work qualifications and experience helped to have a firm grasp of the issues being studied and to exercise sensitivity to the experiences that were shared by participants, as noted by Yin (2014).

In the introduction sections of the semi-structured interview guide, the interviewer introduced himself, explained the purpose of the research, and what would be done with the data that would be collected. After that, the participants were informed about the ethical issues, which included confidentiality of the interview and anonymity of the participants. Permission was sought for audio recording and what would be done with the recording. After providing all the information, the participants were asked if they were willing to be interviewed and then asked for consent. After the introduction, there were some general questions about the background of the participants; information on the age, educational level, employment, and type of interventions they were part of in the CSP was sought. These questions had a dual purpose; firstly, to provide some background on participants, which enabled gaining some context about the participants, and, secondly, to begin the process of building a rapport in the interview.

The introduction and opening questions were followed by the key questions. The key questions were the central and essential questions on the research topic and were designed to collect the core information that could answer the research questions. They included questions on the perceptions of the participants regarding the skills, knowledge, assets, and capabilities obtained from participating in the CSP; the way(s) in which participating in the CSP affected youths’ abilities to make different choices
and decisions about their risk behaviour, relationships, and sexual practices. Further, participants were asked to share their views on the extent that the intended outcomes of the CSP were being met. This was done by asking participants to provide detailed evidence and examples that demonstrated understanding of the results of participating in the CSP by citing, linking, and explaining specific aspects and choices of their behaviour, relationships and sexual practices that had changed as a result. In this central phase of the interview, probing, reflecting, using minimal encouragers, paraphrasing, allowing time for participants to respond, affirming, encouraging, and clarifying are techniques that were used extensively as they were useful in eliciting depth of information and exploring nuances in what was shared by the participants.

The closing questions were structured in a manner that allowed participants to provide in-depth information on the challenges and barriers that were encountered by youths when participating in the CSP. These closing questions allowed for the participants to give their recommendations on what needs to be done to improve the programme; thereby allowing for closure and the reduction of the rapport that had been established and created during the interview, as supported by Hennink et al. (2011).

As indicated earlier, the study also used a focus group guide. The schedule allowed themes, topics, and patterns to emerge as participants responded to one open-ended question at a time (on the causes, consequences and solutions pertaining to the subject under discussion), as advised by Greeff (2011). The semi-structured focus group interview guide enabled both youths and key informants, in their respective groups, to discuss and understand each other’s perspectives, disagree openly, and/or reach a consensus on experiences, benefits, challenges, and opportunities derived from the CSP (Greeff, 2011). Utilising their first-hand knowledge and understanding of the communities, key informants provided in-depth expert information regarding the CSP.

The main advantage of the focus group guide is that it helped the researcher to remain focused, in a group where different views on the same subject were collected (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2009). This also helped collect multiple data at the same time. The disadvantages of a focus group guide are that sometimes the questions may influence the magnitude of control the researcher may have on the group, and therefore restrict participants to talking about certain issues and leaving some. To reduce the
disadvantages, the focus group guide was carefully created to ask the right questions and elicit the type of responses that were most valuable to the study. Moderation skills were also deployed professionally to avoid intentionally or inadvertently injecting personal biases into the participants’ exchange of ideas.

4.9.1 Pilot testing

Pilot testing is a cardinal rule of both qualitative and quantitative research as it serves several purposes (Greeff, 2011; Strydom & Delport, 2011). A pilot study was conducted on a small scale before the main study. This allowed the testing of some of the practical aspects of the study, such as gaining access to the participants, venue, duration, and level of understanding of participants in respect of the way questions were phrased and probed. Delport and Roestenburg (2011, p. 195) note that pilot testing is done with a view “to effect modifications at little cost” before the main study. Similarly, pilot testing was used to focus on specific areas that might have been ambiguous, and modifications and improvements were made to the research instrument’s questions, format, and instructions, thus ensuring quality interviewing during the main study, as advised by Creswell and Creswell (2018), Strydom and Delport (2011) and Strydom (2011c). Pilot testing also allowed for the opportunity to assess how long the study would take and the costs involved, as well as the establishment of relationships with the participants, community, and gatekeepers.

In conducting the pilot study, in-depth interviews with four youths were undertaken. The aim was to process data collected during the pilot study to refine the methodology and data collection instruments by looking at layout, structure, relevance, accuracy, suitability, and appropriateness, per Strydom’s (2011c) advice. All interview participants who took part in the pilot project were not included in the main study. The pilot study was conducted in an NGO that was not part of the main study. No focus group discussion was done during the pilot study. This is because the focus group was not a primary source of data in this study; in fact, the questions for the focus group discussions were themselves generated from the data elicited from the individuals’ in-depth interviews done during the pilot testing.
4.10 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The analysis of qualitative data is a continuous and complex process that involves bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is also a process of interpreting collected data to convert it into organised information to discover underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Ngulube, 2015; Babbie, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 191) add that data analysis is a thorough back-and-forth process that “involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together”. It should be noted that the method of data analysis depends on the type and design of the research. In this study data analysis was guided by Creswell and Creswell’s (2018, p. 192) model of data analysis, which suggests that data analysis is an ongoing process that routinely starts before the first interview and “proceed hand-in-hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study”. Creswell and Creswell’s model, known as thematic analysis or data analysis spiral, was chosen for its flexibility as it does not follow a linear format in analysing and interpreting data. The thematic analysis allowed the discussion of the common themes from the thick descriptions obtained from the youths regarding their experiences in participating in the CSP.

The first step that was followed in the sequential thematic analysis process was “organising and preparing the data for analysis” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). This initial step of managing data involved attentively listening to tape-recorded interviews, going through field notes, and transcribing interviews into a word package that was appropriately labelled and stored on a computer. This initial step was important for familiarising the researcher with the data, thereby ensuring that valuable and critical elements of the interview were not lost and that a consolidated view of the interview was achieved (Shurink et al., 2011).

After the organisation and conversion of the data, the second step that Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193) refer to as “reading and writing memos” was followed. Transcripts were read in their entirety and notes were made on key concepts generating categories and key themes from the participants’ responses. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193) note that in this step, one should start questing “What general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of the ideas?” Themes, sub-themes, and the various perspectives of the individual participants were linked to find
explanations as well as big ideas for the study, in line with the assertion made by Greeff (2011) and Ngulube (2015) that analysing data must consider the words, the context, consistency, frequency of comments, the extensiveness of comments, specificity of comments, and what would not have been said. In summary, in this second step salient topics in the transcripts were identified and noted based on recurring ideas, patterns of behaviour, and beliefs that linked participants to the situation under study.

After identifying categories of themes, the third step commenced, which Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193) refer to as “coding”. This step involves writing a word representing a category in which identified sub-themes that are internally consistent but distinct from one another are classified. Schurink et al. (2011, p. 401) explain the process of coding as a “sanctioned description of methodical and systematic reasoning”. Creswell and Creswell (2018) confirm this view, describing coding as indexing and categorising the texts to establish a framework of thematic ideas. According to Rubin and Babbie (2011), besides making data more manageable, coding also enhances trustworthiness and easy retrieval of information. In this step, recurring ideas and similar statements were grouped, thereby shaping emerging patterns and trends that the data covered in a complex and creative way as described by Rubin and Babbie (2011). Predefined coding categories were used in accordance with the objectives of the study and emergent coding categories were also noted as they surfaced during the development of the data analysis process. The textual data that fell within the ambit of the categories was then colour coded similarly, to differentiate between various categories and themes. Themes, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), represent a correlation of the data in a patterned response or meaning within the data set. Themes were colour coded on index cards and linked to sub-themes and previously colour-coded categories. All participants who participated in the study were coded using a number as follows:

- Youths Female - YF1- YF18 (Youths Female 1-18);
- Youths Male - YM1- YM12 (Youths Male 1-12);
- NGO practitioners - NP1 – NP6 (NGO Practitioners 1-6); and
- DSD officials - DO1 –DO5 (DSD Officials 1-5).
In the fourth step, referred to by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 194) as the “generation of description and theme”, similar categories and patterns were highlighted to interpret the data accordingly whilst seeking to provide plausible explanations for the data and linkages among them. Under this fourth step, a wall chart was also used to organise themes, sub-themes, and categories to provide a “structural organogram”, or big picture of the phenomenon being studied appropriate (Shurink et al., 2011, p.402). This also helped provide a visual description of the data. The most representative sample of verbatim responses from the raw data was selected and excerpts were inserted in the various categories, themes, and sub-themes to ensure that the correspondence was fit and most appropriate.

The last step, described by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 194) as “representing the description and themes” was done by depicting and discussing themes. This final phase involved the writing of a thematic analysis report using the themes. Wherever possible, these themes were substantiated by evidence from participants in the form of verbatim quoted responses on participants’ lived experiences. In addition, the themes were integrated with theory and arguments from literature reviews as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). At this point, arguments were made, gaps were deduced, questions were posed, and recommendations were suggested.

4.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA

Trustworthiness in qualitative data means that the research findings need to be methodologically sound and adequate (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). The findings need to (as closely as possible) reflect the meanings described by the participants (Lietz et al., 2006). Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Bryman (2012) suggest that the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be established by using four strategies, namely credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These aspects were incorporated in this study as explained below.

4.11.1 Credibility

Credibility entails the degree to which the study measurements used in the study are accurate. In this context, it is the level to which the real experiences of the participants
match with what people say about them (Bryman, 2012). This study ensured credibility by:

- **Conducting fieldwork** for a longer period until a point of saturation was reached (Shenton, 2004). The data collection for this study was done over a period of four months;

- **Triangulating data collection methods**, namely in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This entailed the triangulation of data from the youths, NGO practitioners and DSD government officials to ensure the qualitative validity of the findings (Bryman, 2012);

- **Utilising data collection methods and data analysis procedures** derived from those that have been successfully utilised before in comparative studies per the observation by Creswell and Creswell (2018);

- **Perusing relevant documentation**, such as the CSP training manuals, reports, guidelines, and pamphlets with detailed information about the programme. These documents provided information which might have been left out by the participants but provided an overview and full record in writing about the structure and purpose of the CSP. This contributed to the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring that the information collected from the participants concurred with the written documents;

- **Recording all interviews** and keeping a record (field notes) of all the interviews done;

- **Member checking (participant validation)** by interpreting the information and then checking with the participants to ascertain if the interpretation and thematic analysis are consistent, correct, and congruent with their experiences, thereby reducing subjectivity in interpreting information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); and

- **Clearly outlining data collection procedures** to ensure that participants provided relevant data and that there was no loss of meaning when transcribing data from participants.

**Researcher reflexivity** was undertaken throughout the course of the study to mitigate researcher’s subjectivity. The researcher explored his positionality in reference to the fact that he has extensive experience in working with NGOs in
Gauteng which are implementing the CSP and HIV prevention programme. The researcher had to self-consciously put in place some steps to limit researcher bias in relation to choosing the study area and the production of knowledge about the research topic. The researcher engaged in reflexivity through (1) applying methodological frameworks to select the study area and study participants; (2) jotting notes about participants’ comments and researcher’s thoughts during the interview, (3) memoing as soon as possible after an interview, and (4) developing and continually editing the researcher’s subjectivity statement.

4.11.2 Transferability

Transferability is defined by Babbie and Mouton (2011, p. 277) as “the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents”. Although transferability is considered a major challenge in qualitative research due to subjectivity, Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that one can enhance transferability by detailing the research methods, contexts, and assumptions underlying the study. In this study, transferability was achieved by providing a detailed, rich, thick, and contextual description of the sample and the context in which the research was conducted. Should there be interest, future studies concerning the experiences of youths participating in the CSP can be conducted using the same procedures. This study does not assume that the findings will apply to the entire universe of youths participating in the CSP. However, given the rigorous nature of the study, transferability was achieved as the processes of the collection; analysis and interpretation were conducted with adherence to rigorous and ethical research practices, supported by reputed academic researchers.

4.11.3 Confirmability

The concept of conformability demands that steps are taken “to help ensure as far as possible that the research’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Crowe et al., 2011, p.6). To guard against bias, the researcher:
• Provided a detailed description of the methodological process that was followed in the study. The study also triangulated methods of data collection as described earlier, namely in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Moreover, all research documents were kept as evidence needed for an audit trail, as advised by Shenton (2004). The documents are available in the form of recorded audio tapes, field notes, and the actual findings from the study; and
• Performed extensive consultations with the study supervisor and colleagues (peer debriefing) throughout the research process as resources in detecting gaps in the collected data in line with suggestions by Crowe et al. (2011) and Barusch et al. (2011).

4.11.4 Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which the same results can be obtained from the same participants following a repeat of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2012). However, dependability can only be ensured if there is a static presence (Shenton, 2004). In other words, time would have to stand still to ensure the same results.

The fact that this study was undertaken in three sub-districts in CoJ within six registered NGOs describes the environment or social context in which the study is located and occurred. Therefore, a clear and detailed explanation of the procedures which were followed to collect and analyse data was provided to ensure dependability. The triangulation of data from youth, NGO practitioners and DSD officials were used as a cross-checking method. The tape recordings of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions ensured that raw data could be consulted at any time. Care was taken to code the data in a transparent manner.

The functional aspects of the research design were determined. The focus was to choose the most appropriate design for the study. In this regard, specific attention was given to the qualitative research approach, a case study in nature. Detailed steps for data collection and how the processes of analysis and interpretation thereof were established, providing a critical pathway for the methodological approach.

Means of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data have been discussed. This is significant as it has a direct bearing on the credibility, conformability, transferability,
and dependability of the research findings. In the following section, research ethics (a significant aspect of conducting any research study) are discussed regarding the ethical considerations for the study, as well as the ethical conduct of the researcher.

4.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The goal of ethics is to ensure that researchers realise their imperative of searching for truth and knowledge, morally and humanely (Strydom, 2011a; Mouton, 2001). Bryman (2012) and Farrimond (2013) add that ethical considerations entail the use of principles which will guide the research process and the conduct of the researcher. There must be conformity to accepted norms and values through the upholding of specific obligations and responsibilities, particularly in cases where research participants are vulnerable populations such as children, the disabled and the elderly (Scheyvens et al., 2014; Babbie & Mouton, 2011). This study was based on youths’ participation in the CSP and was therefore considered low risk in terms of ethical concerns. Nevertheless, several ethical principles were taken cognisance of, as discussed below.

4.12.1 Social Workers Code of Ethics

The study observed professional ethics as advised by Creswell (2014) and Punch (2005). The study was conducted in the field of social work and therefore was guided by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2017). This is a document that guides the social work practice worldwide and outlines social work principles, values, and standards, regardless of social workers' professional functions, the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve. Regarding research, the document affirms that research should be carried out in a professional manner observing ethical principles such as confidentiality, avoidance of harm, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Furthermore, the code of ethics also highlights that one should report findings accurately and avoid conflict of interest when undertaking research. It is also important to mention that the researcher is fully registered with the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP). This fits the assertion by Strydom (2011a), that one is ethically obliged to ensure that
they are competent and skilled to undertake a proposed study. This researcher has researched various social issues in his work and other academic settings.

In line with the above explanations, the study was carried out in line with social work professional requirements. It took cognisance of social work ethics, namely informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, avoidance of harm, and deception of participants. These ethics will be explained as this section unfolds.

4.12.2 Submission of the proposal to the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee

The University of Fort Hare requires students to submit their research proposals to the academic institution’s Research Ethics Committee, as was done for this research. The Committee assessed whether the study was academically well designed, professionally organised, and would not cause harm to the participants in line with advice by Creswell (2014), Babbie and Mouton (2011) and Terre Blanche et al. (2006). Thus, assessments of this nature are done to ensure that students stick to the ethical procedures and that everything is carried out professionally. After assessing the research proposal for this study, the Committee granted permission and issued a research clearance certificate for the study to be conducted.

4.12.3 Permission from Non-Governmental Organisations to perform research

Gatekeepers are people who control activities in institutions as well as grant authority to outside interested parties wishing to gain insight into their activities (Creswell, 2014; Heath et al., 2009). To this end, permission to carry out the study in six NGOs was applied for and was granted. Permission to do the pilot testing of study instruments at one other NGO that did not participate in the main study was also sought and granted.

4.12.4 Informed consent

The British Education Research Association (2004) as cited in Heath et al. (2009, p. 23) defines informed consent as “the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, before the research getting underway”. This means that participants must be furnished with full information about the research, and they should choose to participate knowing very well what the research
is about (Strydom, 2011a; Silverman, 2010). Such information includes the name of the person doing the research, the aims, the time required, and voluntary participation, maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity (Gray, 2009). In this vein, the above was clearly explained, and youths and key informants signed a consent form before participating in the research process (see Appendix 2: Consent form and Appendix 5: Focus group consent form).

4.12.5 Voluntary participation

It is a foundational principle of social research to never coerce anyone into participation as participation must be voluntary (Strydom, 2011a). Sharing all information with participants helped put them in a position to choose to participate or not in the study, thereby eliminating coercion. It was also explained to participants that they could withdraw at any time should they feel uncomfortable continuing. Thus, data were obtained using the principle of voluntary participation as opposed to forced participation (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2010; Punch, 2005). Those youths, NGO practitioners and DSD officials who participated in the study did so on a purely voluntary basis.

4.12.6 Anonymity

Anonymity means that the real names of participants are not used or revealed (Creswell, 2014). In line with the above-mentioned, no participants' information that directly identifies their names or contact numbers was written in the study. In instances where quotations from participants were cited in the study, participants' codes instead of their names were used.

4.12.7 Confidentiality

Cognisance of confidentiality was taken throughout the research. Confidentiality means that no information gathered from the participants will be shared without their consent (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Strydom, 2011a, p. 119). Details and information gathered from study participants were treated with secrecy. The interviews were conducted at venues which warranted privacy for the participants. In addition, whilst confidentiality could not be guaranteed in focus group discussions, participants were instructed to maintain confidentiality by not disclosing information discussed in focus
groups. Raw data was also locked in a safe place to ensure that data remain confidential and inaccessible. Lastly, it was also indicated to the participants, through the informed consent letter, that raw data, recorded voice audios, transcriptions and informed consent letters will be securely stored for a minimum of five years, according to the University of Fort Hare’s stipulations.

4.12.8 Avoidance of harm

Strydom (2011a, p. 115) observes that harm to participants in the social sciences is emotional. The goal of the study was to explore the experiences of youths participating in the CSP. This involved discussing issues around HIV and AIDS, which could have the potential to trigger participants suppressed or repressed emotions, specifically those who might have been affected by the HIV pandemic in their lives. Participants were informed about the potential impact of the study and offered the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they so wished without any negative consequences.

Harm was also minimised by arranging that those participants who might be affected would be provided with supportive counselling from a qualified professional and experienced social worker, working for the DSD. Furthermore, the ‘member checking’ activities and the debriefing of participants that happened at the end of interview sessions afforded participants a reflective opportunity to work through their experiences and thereby minimise harm, alongside all precautions. Strydom (2011a) notes that through debriefing, problems generated by the research experience will be corrected as participants' questions are answered and misconceptions are addressed. Also previously highlighted, the research proposal was submitted to the University’s Research Ethics Committee which checked, among other things, that the participants would not be harmed by participating in the study.

4.12.9 Deception of participants

Bryman (2012, p. 143) notes that “deception occurs when researchers represent their work as something other than what it is”. Avoidance of deception of participants in this study was done by clearly communicating the goal and procedures of the study. There was no misrepresentation of facts, which could have violated the respect of participants. No information was withheld from participants and participants were
informed that they would not receive any payment for participating in the interviews and focus group discussions.

4.12.10 Analysis and publication of findings

A report was compiled as accurately and objectively as possible following research ethics. The results were not manipulated in any way. Data were analysed and included both positive and negative aspects without exaggerating or minimising facts (Neuman, 2000). The shortcomings and limitations of the study were also mentioned. Participants received feedback on the findings and the participating NGOs and DSD were given a copy of the research report. The sharing of research findings “is a form of recognition and gratitude, and it helps to maintain future good relationships with the community” (Strydom, 2011c, p. 126). Acknowledgement of references to avoid plagiarism was done correctly. Study participants were also informed of the intentions to publish papers in reputable journals emanating from the findings of the study.

4.13 SUMMARY

The area of study has been described in detail in this chapter. The methodology that was used in the study has also been outlined, covering all the details related to the research approach, design, sampling, collection of data, and how the data were analysed, as well as the ethical considerations for the study. The next chapter will focus on the findings that were drawn from participants.
CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the methodology that was employed in this study. The main aim of the study was to provide insights into the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province. The current chapter presents the findings of the study in accordance with the objectives of the study. Socio-demographic information for participants and the profiles of the NGOs that participated in the study are presented first, followed by the themes, sub-themes and categories identified according to the objectives of the study. Verbatim quotes from the interviews and focus group discussions are used to support the identified themes, sub-themes, and categories.

5.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

There were three categories of participants who took part in this study. These were the youths, NGO practitioners, and DSD officials.

5.2.1 Socio-demographic information of youths

In total, 30 youths participated in the study. Table 1 presents the characteristics of these youths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows that of the 30 youths who participated in the study, many of them were females (18) while the rest (12) were males. Regarding age range, the majority (13) of the youths were within the age bracket of 21 to 25 years and this was followed by those within the age range of 18 to 20 years (11). Finally, some of the youths (6) were aged 15 to 17 years. The educational level of the youths was also sought; the majority (16) of them were at the secondary school level. There were many with a matric (11) and only a few (3) were at the tertiary education level. Concerning employment status, only a few (3) were employed. On the participation of youths in the programme, many of them (11) were in the programme for three years and this was followed by others (8) that had been in the programme for two years. Some (5) were in the programme for more than three years while the remainder (6) were in it for one year.
5.2.2 Socio-demographic information of NGO practitioners

In total, six NGO practitioners participated in the study. Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of these practitioners.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of NGO practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (in years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The number of years of experience implementing the programme</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and more</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that all six of the NGO practitioners that participated in the study were female. Regarding age range, two were within the age bracket of 30 to 39 years, another two were within the age bracket of 40 to 49 years and the other two were within the age bracket of 50 to 59 years. With regards to the number of years of experience implementing the programme, the majority (3) had four to five years, some (2) had five and more years, and one had three to four years.

5.2.3 Socio-demographic information of DSD officials

There were five DSD officials who participated in the study. Table 3 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of these officials.
Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of DSD officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of years of experience implementing the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that of the five DSD officials that participated in the study, the majority (4) were female, and one was male. Regarding age range, the majority (4) were within the age bracket of 30-39 years, and one was within the age bracket of 40 to 49 years. The number of years of experience implementing the programme was also sought, and the following results were obtained: first, the majority (3) had four to five years of experience, one had three to four years of experience and one other had five and more years of experience.

5.2.4 Non-Governmental Organisations’ profiles

A total of six NGOs participated in the study. Table 4 summarises the profiles of these NGOs.
Table 4: Non-Governmental Organisations' profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO1</td>
<td>A community-based and registered organisation with 20 years of operation. The NGO was started by two females as a response to HIV and AIDS. The organisation has six years of experience in rendering the CSP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO2</td>
<td>A community-based and registered organisation that has been in existence for the past 16 years. The NGO was formed by a now-deceased female in response to the HIV pandemic in the community. The organisation has been involved in the CSP for five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO3</td>
<td>Formed by a female to respond to the growing numbers of children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, this community-based and registered organisation has been operating for the past 22 years. The organisation has been part of the CSP for four years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO4</td>
<td>This community-based and registered organisation was formed by a female 15 years ago to support children and their families infected and affected by HIV. The NGO has four years of experience in the CSP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO5</td>
<td>Spouses started the community-based registered organisation 16 years ago to support children in need, especially those affected by HIV and AIDS. The organisation has been part of the CSP for five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO6</td>
<td>A community-based and registered NGO formed by a female 17 years ago in response to HIV and AIDS in the community. The NGO has been participating in the CSP for four years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 YOUTHS PERCEPTIONS REGARDING BENEFITS OF COMBINING ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES AND HIV PREVENTION EDUCATION FOR YOUTHS IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS OF GAUTENG

Main themes, sub-themes and categories formulated from the data on the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng are presented in table 5. The main themes are recorded in the first column of the table. The middle column of the table shows the sub-themes that emerged from the main themes, while the last column shows the categories generated from the data.

Table 5: Main-themes, sub-themes, and categories of youths perceptions regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of combined activities for youths</td>
<td>HIV prevention knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• Acquisition of HIV prevention knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Skills to negotiate safer sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Openness on issues of sex and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• Help youths to develop economic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have access to opportunities to reach potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Good money behaviour (money management skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lessons in job searching and career choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychosocial support and integrated life skills</td>
<td>• Support with emotional, psychological, and behavioural challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Having fun whilst engaging in informative, educative, and inspiring activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teamwork and peer support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training and local capacity building</td>
<td>• Recruitment and training of youths and facilitators from local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Building of youths’ capabilities to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment of AGYW</td>
<td>Changing social norms and societal impediments</td>
<td>• Peer interactions enhance understanding of gender roles, attitudes, and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural barriers are actively addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determinants of AGYW’s vulnerability and risk</td>
<td>• Improved understanding of AGYW’s vulnerability and risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Some parents are not supportive of AGYW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.1 Main Theme 1: Benefits of combined activities for youths

The following sub-themes relate to the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education:

- HIV prevention knowledge and skills;
- Economic knowledge and skills;
- Psychosocial support and integrated life skills; and
- Training and local capacity building.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: HIV prevention knowledge and skills

A core activity that was raised by all categories of participants was about attending structured curricula that equip the youths with knowledge on HIV prevention. Some participants referred to HIV prevention as Vhutshilo (name for the curriculum used in the programme for HIV prevention). Many youths participants noted that they found the HIV prevention curriculum to be thorough and of high quality, as it was informative, engaging, and easy to follow. This was expressed in the following manner:

*We do so many activities, but Vhutshilo is my favourite. In Vhutshilo we talk about HIV prevention, negotiating safer sex and how to deal with life stressors in a healthy way. There are also sessions and groups for those who are living with HIV.*

(Participant YM1)

*The HIV prevention sessions we participate in have so much information that enables us to open-up on issues of sex, relationships with boyfriends and contraceptive methods that we can use to avoid unplanned pregnancies. We receive the privacy we need as girls to ask questions and get assistance.*

(Participant YF4)

Some youths mentioned that the information they obtained from the HIV prevention curriculum had broadened their understanding of available options to them on products and methods to use to prevent infection. Some female youths mentioned that:
Vhutshilo gives us participants information about HIV and AIDS, how to prevent it, about sexual reproductive health, and then it helps us to make informed decisions about our health issues. (Participant YF3)

Vhutshilo has helped me to have many choices when it comes to sexual matters. I will use the options we learnt when I have sex so that I protect myself and work on my goals. (Participant YF9)

Some key informants expressed a view that giving youths HIV prevention knowledge was the fulcrum of the CSP and was based on creative and practical activities that youth could relate with. This was expressed as follows:

The Vhutshilo sessions are based on practical life experiences and relate to what the youths go through in their everyday lives which exposes them to the HIV. It gives them excellent knowledge on HIV prevention (Participant NP6)

This programme is all about young people accessing reliable HIV and SRH information. We teach them different ways to approach sexual health. We teach them how they can be infected with HIV and what steps they can take to protect themselves but also what they should do if they test positive. (Participant NP2)

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Economic knowledge and skills

Economic strengthening training and utilising the Financial Capabilities curriculum were repeatedly cited by many participants from all categories as key activities of the CSP. Some youths participants stated that the economic and financial capabilities training was attractive to them as it taught them good money behaviour and gave them tips about how to start their businesses. The participants noted the following:

Financial literacy training teaches us money management skills to improve our economic wellbeing. We get lessons in job searching, how to write a good CV, how to behave in a job interview, and how to use money wisely on things that contribute to our education. (Participant YF7)

Financial Capabilities is all about finances, learning how to save and opening of bank accounts. We also get entrepreneurship skills on how to start a small business. There are some children who are now selling sweets and muffins at school and other few things in the community to make money. (Participant YF5)
Economic strengthening training was viewed by some NGO practitioners as a comprehensive package for youths. One practitioner remarked that:

*Financial and economic strengthening training is comprehensive enough to support youths in life, it gives them knowledge about budgeting, finances, business, CV writing, looking for jobs and how to be financially wise.* (Participant NP2)

A few youths mentioned that the Financial Capabilities curriculum was a platform for showing youths meaningful ways of engaging with money matters. One youth described that:

*They encourage us to be independent thinkers as we have been given ideas about making and saving money, opening banking accounts and working as a group to develop small businesses.* (Participant YM10)

A few youths also stated that the programme was challenging them to develop some creative and innovative business ideas. A female youth indicated that:

*Being part of this programme has taught me to be creative and to understand that you can make money using your brains and hands and not your body. Now I can do people’s hair, sell small items, and get something rather than waiting for men to give me money in exchange of sexual favours. I do not need blessers in my life.* (Participant YF13)

In the focus group, some NGO practitioners pointed out that Financial Capabilities training was well-liked by the youths, as many of them bought into the idea that the knowledge and skills they were learning were inspiring and will be helpful to them in the future. An NGO practitioner declared as follows:

*The programme empowers the youths to dream big for their future. Before the programme, youths used to be afraid of imagining things, but the programme has given them important knowledge about economic possibilities. Because of this, the attitude and behaviour of youths have improved as some now believe they can change their economic situations.* (Participant NP4)

A DSD official applauded the programme for giving young people financial management skills, noting that the skills they were receiving will guide their career and livelihood choices in future. The DSD official said:
NGOs are doing well to train our children on financial knowledge and skills, it allows our children to search and discover new things that they will use in future to develop their careers or to establish enterprises of their own. (Participant DO1).

5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Psychosocial support and integrated life skills

Some youths participants mentioned that they were attracted to the programme due to the space, opportunities and support it gave them to deal with emotional, psychological, and behavioural challenges they were experiencing. They explained that being with their peers in the programme allowed them to have fun whilst engaging in informative, educative, and inspiring activities. The youths participants described their experience as follows:

I walked into the programme with my problems and feeling sad, but I would go back home happy and feeling much better. We can ‘ventilate’ in the programme and have fun with each other, and this takes away some of our distress and anger. (YF5)

The programme is very beneficial to us the young people who attend. We work through our issues that we cannot discuss at home. Our facilitators give us information and support us to respond to our fears and needs. We now even have strength to face our fears about HIV testing and can raise issues of GBV which it would usually be very hard for us to talk about. (YF6)

Through presentations and role plays done during training sessions, the programme was recognised for building youths’ self-esteem and communication skills. Some youths stated that:

The programme has taught me many things about life. Before joining the programme, I was shy and could not say no to people like my friends about many things. Standing in front of the class and doing role plays during training has helped me. I can say I have gained confidence and I do not just agree to everything. (YM9)

As participants we get to engage in a lot of communication skills that you can even use later in life. For example, skills like negotiating for condom use, how to talk with peers and how to tackle life issues. (Participant YF1)
Some youths mentioned that they had benefitted from facilitated peer support networks and safe spaces provided by the programme, as they could share and discuss their feelings with peers and seek advice from trained facilitators.

*The programme and NGOs have given us free and safe space to engage freely among ourselves as youths which helps us to become a good team.* (Participant YF1)

Equally, some NGO practitioners also hailed the programme for giving young people platforms where they felt physically and emotionally safe to connect and build trusting relationships amongst themselves, whilst acquiring essential life skills to live healthy and socio-economically empowered lives. The NGO practitioners stated that:

*As friends and peers, the youth encourage and support each other to make better informed decisions. As mentors and managers, we also give them counselling which helps them relate more easily and be more open and honest.* (Participant NP2)

*Young people come here to leave all their problems behind; we give them opportunities to release their problems and to learn how to live healthy and socio-economically empowered lives.* (Participant NP1)

*The mere fact of being in this programme protects our youths from idleness which drives them into having sex, crime and abusing drugs. Here we guide them and make them feel safe and trusted.* (Participant NP5)

Some youths participants spoke about receiving psychosocial support and getting good advice on SRH, HIV, and STIs. For instance, two female youths who were born with HIV mentioned that they only came to know of their HIV status through the programme. Although they were both on ART, they mentioned that their parents had not disclosed their statuses and they had been lied to on the reasons why they were taking medication. The participants described their experiences as follows:

*We learn how one can get HIV and why we should always test for HIV. My parents did not tell me that I was HIV positive, they lied that the pills I was drinking were for a heart problem. I came to know about my HIV status when we were referred to the clinic to test for HIV. I was very angry when I found out. Things are now okay*
between me and my parents. The mentors and manager helped my family to deal with the disclosure issues. (YM11)

My mother had difficulties in telling me what kind of medication I was taking and why I was taking it. So, she had to approach my mentor here at the organisation who helped her on how to tell me. When my mother finally told me, I also had to come to the mentor here for counselling because it was difficult for me to accept. (Participant YF15)

A focus group participant also held a similar view that the NGOs were doing a lot of counselling which was helping young people and their families to openly discuss and disclose HIV. In the words of the participant:

This programme is helping the kids and parents a lot. Families have been assisted and supported so much especially when it comes to disclosure of children’s HIV status, and even the HIV status of the parents themselves. It is the staff from this programme that helps the families with counselling and any other emotional support needed. (Participant DO5)

5.3.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Training and local capacity building

Many participants, specifically key informants, explained that all the activities and interventions of the CSP were being delivered through engaging and training the local youths in the community by the NGOs. Some further noted that the facilitators or trainers who were running the programme were themselves young people recruited from local communities. It was also mentioned that the training in the programme contributes towards building and developing community capacities as the local facilitators or trainers learnt skills to plan, mobilise and implement community empowerment interventions. The views of participants are expressed in the following interview transcript extracts:

We like that this programme is run by tapping on available local resources in addressing the problems facing the communities. Apart from capacitating the youths with knowledge and skills there is also employment creation as the programme facilitators and mentors are people from this community, people who understand very well the community’s needs. (Participant DO2)
Programme staff are trained and capacitated to implement and cope with the demands of the programme. At the end of the day, they also get certificates to show that they have been trained. They can still use these certificates even when they leave our NGOs. We are also planning to recruit some of the programme participants as facilitators once they graduate, because there are some that we can see are brilliant to run the programme. I hope this will boost their confidence and encourage others to attend. (Participant NP1)

The programme was also accredited for bringing organisations and health facilities closer together on addressing issues pertinent to youths’ health. Some key informants highlighted that:

*Through the trainings and capacity building of this programme, the NGOs are now able to partner and work nicely with clinics and health facilities, something they were not doing before. They now refer most of their youths to the clinic for family planning, condoms, SRH and PREP services. We like the capacity that the NGOs now have because it really helps with reducing HIV infection for young people.* (Participant DO5)

*The programme has taught us to work with other agencies in training and developing strategies to improve our operations and quality of services that we give to our communities and beneficiaries.* (Participant NP5)

A few youths confirmed that the facilitators were well-trained as evidenced by the way they conducted themselves. This had a positive effect on the youths’ response to the programme. A youth participant put it that:

*The reason why me and my friends always want to attend the programme is because of the mentors who facilitate the programme who are well trained. They know what they are doing. The way that they treat us is very good and professional.* (Participant YM10)

5.3.2 Main Theme 2: Empowerment of adolescent girls and young women

The following sub-themes relate to the empowerment of AGYW:

- Changing social norms and societal impediments; and
• Determinants of AGYW's vulnerability and risk.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Changing social norms and societal impediments

Some female youths noted that the interaction with boys in the programme was empowering to them as they could now understand how the double nature of gender norms profoundly affects AGYW's health-related behaviours and shape differential access to social and economic opportunities. This is what one of the female participants said when explaining the activities that tackle gender norms and how she had been empowered by the programme:

*Because of the sessions in the programme, now I know that doing home chores and marriage is not the ultimate thing for me as a young female. Now I know that I am a young female from this community, and I can get employment, I can do any other income-generating activities for me to survive. We also did a session based on GBV, and now I know how to say no to a boyfriend, know how to negotiate during sex.* (Participant YF2)

Many female youths also noted that the programme had built their self-esteem and they were now able to engage and ascertain themselves when barriers to practices perpetuate harmful gender norms. This is expressed in the following quotes:

*I now have the courage to tell my mother that she must give me time to do my schoolwork, just like my brother. I also demand that she gives some house chores to my brothers.* (Participant YF3)

*So, it has also helped when we discuss even with our families. Our mothers now know that a girl child can be able to be powerful like boys, we can have a career and make a life for ourselves without depending on men.* (Participant YF6)

*I now know that I do not need my boyfriend or father’s permission to make decisions about my health. Before I was scared that my father might beat me up if he heard I was at the clinic on my own for contraceptives.* (Participant YF4)

Some NGO practitioners concurred that the programme was empowering the female youths on gender issues. However, others stated that for real empowerment of AGYW to be realised, more rigorous efforts were still necessary as the little change that was
being noted was being upset by certain societal conditions. An NGO practitioner explained the matter as follows:

*Girls feel free to express themselves in the sessions. But I think there is still a bit more work that is needed in terms of gender issues to be addressed because children live in a society that has got its own belief systems, attitudes, and expectations. So, in as much as they learn but when they go out you may see that there are many voices that can cause those inequalities in terms of gender-related issues. But we have seen some children are able to pick out some points and incidents to say no you may not do this to another adolescent because of what they have learnt. So, there is that change in behaviour, there is that boldness in them able to address issues related to gender in and around them. For example, the adolescents especially girls now know that they are not less important to the boys. They know that they can make informed decisions concerning their lives. But then it is just that there are other factors within the community, it is not only about them. So, there is still that is needed for the community as well to get the same awareness that the children and adolescents in the programme are getting.* (Participant NP1)

### 5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Determinants of girls’ and women’s vulnerability and risk

When asked to describe how the programme was playing a role in bringing about changes in gender dynamics, all categories of participants mentioned that the programme had brought about an improved understanding of the determinants or causes of women’s vulnerability and risk. Poverty and economic deprivation dominated the list. A male youth noted the following:

*We must not forget that there might be many factors that drive girls to engage in sex and poverty is one of them. There is this thing called transactional sex whereby young girls who come from a family that is poverty-stricken and need food use it to cover their needs. And there comes a guy who promises them to give food but in return wants to sleep with them. So, there is need to ensure that the needs of the girls are taken care of which this CSP tries to address by giving young people information about how to engage in safer sex and so on.* (Participant YM2)

Other determinants that were raised for AGYW’s vulnerability and risk are societal norms that regard women as second-class citizens, women’s voicelessness,
powerlessness, exclusion, and diminished social networks. An NGO practitioner explained that:

_We all know that women and girls are not given opportunities like those that are given to men and boys. They are not consulted or included on any issues, even on issues that affect them directly. Some fathers and men do not even want their daughters or wives to be part of any community development projects._ (Participant NP5)

To show that they understand and take the determinants of women's vulnerability and risk seriously, a few male participants noted that they were trying to educate both their peers and the community at large about issues around GBV. The following was stated:

_Personally, after learning about gender-based violence in the sessions, I began to understand that men feel that they are superior to women, and the session addressed that issue very well. As a leader in the community youth forum, I have started educating other youth in the community to change their mindset on the matter._ (Participant YM3)

5.4 THE WAY(S) IN WHICH PARTICIPATING IN ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING AND HIV PREVENTION EDUCATION CHANGED PARTICIPATING YOUTHS’ RISK BEHAVIOUR AND SEXUAL PRACTICES

Main-themes, sub-themes and categories formulated from the data on the way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme (the CSP) changed participating youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices are presented in table 6.

**Table 6: How participation in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme changed youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The interplay between economic strengthening and | Risk factors for HIV infection | - Understanding of structural drivers of HIV
- Risk mitigation and coping (against risky sexual behaviour and practices
- Awareness and linkages to contraception and SRH services
- Increased usage of health services by youths
- Making informed decisions regarding sexual life |
5.4.1 Main Theme: Interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices

The following sub-themes relate to the interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices:

- Risk factors for HIV infection;
- Building youths' individual agency; and
- Unintended consequences.

5.4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Risk factors for HIV infection

Some youths mentioned that participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention interventions had helped them to understand the intricacy and interconnectedness between poverty, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities and lack of correct HIV prevention education and the contribution that this has in increasing their exposure to HIV infection. One youth participant had the following to say:

*Most of us who are participating in this programme come from very poor backgrounds. Like in this community poverty is almost everywhere. Girls are pushed into relationships with older men so that they can get money to look after themselves. At the end, what happens? They get HIV. So, the programme is teaching us exactly what is happening in life.* (Participant YM3)

The view above by the youth participant was like the one shared by a DSD official:
Poverty is a reality in the communities that these youth live. People struggle to survive. It is not surprising then that the youths, mainly girls, engage in behaviours that expose them to HIV because they want to make ends meet. What we therefore love most about the CSP is that it educates the youths about all these factors. (Participant DO3)

Some youth participants were of the view that participating in combined economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities was helping youths to understand that there are other things that they can do in life as opposed to preoccupying themselves with sex. One youth participant said:

This programme is very demanding, especially for some of us for are still in school as we must also do our homework. The programme keeps us busy, and we cannot think of doing sex come or idling around. (Participant YF14)

Many youth participants stated that they found HIV prevention education activities of the CSP (through the Vhutshilo curriculum), to have equipped them with skills to use and not to engage in behaviours associated with HIV. They said the Vhutshilo curriculum gave them exposure to all the information on HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support. The youth participants described their experiences as follows:

Through HIV prevention education we now fully understand the importance of practising correct and consistent use of condoms. Even as girls we now know how we should communicate and negotiate safe sex with our boyfriends. (Participant YF8)

Now I can negotiate for safer sex. I also have knowledge about condom use, and how I should behave to avoid HIV and STIs. (Participant YF13)

A female youth reported that the CSP had made them see that there was nothing beneficial at all in engaging in sex as young people. She mentioned that, together with her friend, they were now abstaining from sexual activity. She further expressed regret that they should have postponed their sexual debut. She expressed this as follows:

Because of the programme I have learnt that it is fine for me to abstain, to wait until I get done with my studies. I know my friend who is also here in the programme is
also abstaining. We even do not like it that we had started having sex when we are so young. (Participant YF9)

Some youths noted, that due to the referral mechanism between the NGOs and health facilities, they were now fully aware of where and how to obtain SRH services. Some of the youth participants mentioned that:

I know where to access health services including testing regularly for HIV. Before this programme we did not know how we could ask for these services from the clinic. (Participant YF13)

Because some of us are already active in sexual activity we can go to the clinic, and they give us family planning. The programme has also taught us how to ask for PREP, a pill you can take to prevent you from getting HIV. (Participant YF2)

In concurrence with the above, one NGO practitioner also noted that the programme had strong referral mechanisms, not only with clinics but with other outside NGOs that specialise in health and youth SRH services. The practitioner explained that:

We do not only work with clinics, but we also invite other big NGOs to bring their mobile clinics to our organisations to give our youth regular HIV, STI and SRH services and information. (Participant NP6)

A female youth pointed out that her participation in the CSP had made her aware of the dangers associated with engaging in high-risk sexual behaviours with older, rich men in exchange for money or gifts. She said:

I have also learnt that there are safe ways of making money like through saving groups and opening a small business. So, instead of depending on blessers like what I used to do before, now I can look for better ways of supporting myself, not using my body to get money. (Participant YF8)

Peer pressure was cited by many youth participants as a risk factor for HIV infection, as it put youth at risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviour and practices. Explaining how the programme had equipped them with knowledge and skills to parry peer pressure, some youth participants had the following to say:
Instead of getting wrong or uninformed advice from my friends that mislead me into making bad decisions regarding life issues, now I get good advice from the grown-up who have experience. (Participant YM11)

Growing up in a township, you get influenced by your friends to engage in sex and so on. At times you just follow what your friends tell you because you want to belong. If you see their older boyfriends buying them things like phones, then you also want the same thing otherwise you will feel out of place. But you know these things do not come cheap. You must pay back through sex even if it means unprotected sex. I am happy that Vhutshilo has taught me about choosing good friends to avoid such temptations. (Participant YF2)

To be honest, I have been a victim of peer pressure. When I look at some of the things, I have done like sleeping with men that are much older than me, I can see that it was due to bad friends that I had. But at least I am happy that this programme has taught me to make wise decisions about life. (Participant YF8)

Some NGO practitioners and DSD officials observed a change in some youths in terms of risky sexual behaviour. However, they cautioned that the change was not at the desired level as they were still witnessing cases of HIV infection and teenage pregnancy amongst the youths. This is what one of the NGO practitioners said:

I can say to a certain extent there has been changes. Children and adolescents are now free to go to clinics and take condoms, for family planning and other SRH services. So, there is that behaviour change in terms of making use of the services to prevent HIV as well as preventing unplanned pregnancies. But there is still more that needs to be done as it is not all the youth who are making use of the services. (Participant NP3).

A DSD official also agreed with the above sentiments from the NGO practitioner by saying that:

Of course, we are getting positive feedback in terms of reduction in teenage pregnancy, improved numbers of teenagers who are testing for HIV, among other things. But we still have a long way to go to fully realise the behaviour change that we anticipate. The numbers of children who are still testing HIV positive and
teenagers who are getting pregnant is still high remains worrisome to us. (Participant DO1)

5.4.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Building youth individual agency

There was a broad acknowledgement by many youth participants that, through the mixed activities of the programme, youths were being empowered and given new purpose and energy to re-focus their lives. Some of the youths expressed this as follows:

Before my participation in the programme, I did not have feelings of self-worth and I tended to always blame myself for all my social problems. I would drink alcohol, smoke dagga and sleep with many women, some older than me, without protection. But now I look for solutions for my life. (Participant YM3)

I used to be very doubtful about myself but now I can take responsibility for my actions and I know what is needed for me to make reasonable decisions for myself. This programme has given us young people voices, our facilitators and managers listen to us, and we communicate well. I now know I have power over my life. (Participant YM6)

A few NGO practitioners confirmed the role of the programme in re-purposing the lives of youths. They explained that, by participating in the programme, some youths were now aspiring for self-reliance and a desire to lead better lives than the ones they were experiencing. Some of the NGO practitioners noted that:

Unemployment and idleness are pushing our youths into risk behaviour like abusing drugs and alcohol. This programme is educating them about such things. We give them a new purpose in life, and we open their eyes. Many of them now have ambitions and dreams. (Participant NP6)

The facilitators and mentors in this programme are people that youth look up to and respect. They are self-sufficient and some of our young people also now want the same for themselves. These trainers are good role models that inspire our youth to want to do better. (Participant NP5).

A DSD official mentioned that the programme helped ensure youths are set on the path to reclaiming opportunities they might have missed. The official indicated that:
Some of the youths in the programme are those who dropped out of school. By being in the programme, those youths now have an opportunity to start something afresh for their lives and earn a dignified living. (Participant DO3)

In agreement that the programme was giving them new opportunities to pull themselves out of poverty and to make prudent choices about their lives, a youth participant stated that:

As we speak, I have jointly opened a hair salon with a friend, and we hope to grow bigger. This is far much better than not doing anything. If I do not do anything that is when I end up doing mischievous things like drinking and sleeping around with many boys. (Participant YF9)

An NGO practitioner who emphasised the importance of combining HIV prevention knowledge and economic strengthening activities for effective behaviour change and self-sustenance, particularly for AGYW, put it this way:

What we find is that girls involve themselves in risk sexual behaviours because of not having money or because of poverty. So, when you empower them with the knowledge of preventing HIV and then combining that with financial knowledge, it enables them to take charge of their lives. So, the burden of being involved in risky behaviour because of poverty gets lessened which helps them to remain safe and stand for themselves. (Participant NP2)

5.4.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Unintended consequences

For some youths, participation in the CSP created opportunities for them to explore and practise sexual activities in ways that could be viewed as being inadvertent to the projected outcomes of the programme. The participants, a male and female youths reported, in separate individual interviews, that since the programme had equipped the youths with knowledge on various SRH and family planning services and methods, it was easy to engage in sexual activity the way they want as they know how to defend themselves from HIV infection and unplanned pregnancies. This is what the youths said:

Let me be honest. I am sexually active and now that I have all these options at my disposal regarding HIV transmission, I am happy that I now have freedom to be
involved in sexual activities the way I want. For example, I can use dual or triple protection at the same time, which is condom, contraceptives, and PREP. (Participant YF10)

Some people are abusing this knowledge and skills they gain in the programme. I have friends who tell me that they will not get HIV or STIs or impregnate someone if they do not want to because they were taught and now know all the methods to defend themselves. (Participant YM7)

5.5 THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTENDED OUTCOMES (FOR ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING) OF THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME ARE BEING MET IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

The main themes, sub-themes and categories generated from the data in Section 5.5 and the extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of the CSP are being met in resource-constrained settings are presented in table 7.

Table 7: Main themes, sub-themes, and categories on the extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of CSP are being met

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youths’ economic empowerment</td>
<td>Making financial decisions</td>
<td>• Financial literacy and setting meaningful goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of money and income to practise acquired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial literacy skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Savings, budgeting, and banking</td>
<td>• Value of savings, budgeting, and banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Need for provision of resources for youth to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• savings, budgeting, and banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earning money</td>
<td>• Employability and work readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Entrepreneurship and income-generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Less theory and more practice needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Incorporate apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Give youths start-up capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Economic viability and resilience are elusive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.1 Main Theme 1: Youths’ economic empowerment expectations

The sub-themes below relate to youths’ economic empowerment expectations:

- Making financial decisions;
- Savings, budgeting, and banking; and
- Earning money.
5.5.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Making financial decisions

In answering the questions on whether the intended outcomes for economic strengthening were being met, all categories of participants reported that youths had acquired knowledge to make informed decisions about finances. The terms ‘financial literacy’ and ‘financial capability’ were used interchangeably as participants described their understanding of the financial education the youths had received and the effect it was having on their abilities to keep track of their money, plan, and make informed decisions when spending money. A youth participant said:

Although at first I did not understand financial literacy training, I started to like it in session two or three. Some of my friends called it money training. They taught us useful tips to use when making decisions to use money. (Participant YM4)

Another youth shared her experience and views:

We were taught that when we have money, we must spend it wisely not just on anything that is not important to our goals. They said we must live within means and get out of problem debt as it takes away all the money. (Participant YF2)

Many key informants were of the view that financial literacy training was very good, as it supports young people to make positive choices and set meaningful goals around money matters. Some NGO practitioners stated that:

Our aim in this training is to build an understanding of each young person’s attitude and behaviour around money and the role money plays in their world. The training teaches them to understand what is coming in and what is going out when spending money; it also teaches them not to get into debt and to know which bills must be paid regularly such as rental bills and to avoid spending money on unnecessary luxuries like expensive phones and clothes. (Participant NP6)

Young people in this community complain that they do not have any disposable money to practise what we teach; however, our goal is to give them good knowledge of finance so when they are adults and are working for themselves, they will be able to manage their money. (Participant NP4)

A DSD official pronounced a view that:
The training on financial capabilities for young people is very good because it will make the country, in future, to have people that are responsible and that will help reduce many of the problems we see in society of people misusing their money. (DO1)

5.5.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Savings, budgeting, and banking

In explaining whether the intended outcomes of participation in economic strengthening had/had not become what the youths expected, all categories of participants mentioned that the training youths had received had built their knowledge and awareness of saving, budgeting, and banking. Some youths shared their experiences and views as follows:

I now understand the importance of saving and keeping money in the bank. If you do not save money, you cannot buy things you want to buy in the future, and in case you need money for an emergency you will not have anything to use. Me and my three friends in this programme we started to plan by having our own savings. When our parents give us money for lunch at school, we save R20 each person every month. Our facilitators know about our savings group, and they help to keep our money in the manager’s office here at the organisation. (Participant YF3)

I might not have the money to save but this training has helped me to start thinking about saving. When I start working I will make sure I spend my money wisely and I save as most as I can. (Participant YM8)

An NGO practitioner observed that:

Our youths now know that if someone wants information and advice on money issues they must go to banks and other right places, not loan sharks. (Participant NP2)

A DSD officer confirmed that economic strengthening training had improved youths’ money management skills by commenting that:

This training is very good as youths learn money management and they gain skills to save and look for money as they enter adulthood. (Participant DO3)
5.5.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Earning money

All categories of participants noted that the training had brought an improvement in employability and work readiness knowledge and skills by developing youths’ soft skills and mentoring them on how to effectively seek jobs, write curriculum vitae (CV) and conduct themselves in interviews. A youth participant and DSD official narrated that:

_In employability, you learn about how you can prepare yourself for the world out of school. This is where you are taught about how to structure a CV that fits where you want to go. You also learn about how to conduct yourself during interviews and even how to apply for a job. I can therefore say that the intervention has developed me so that I can stand on my own as an individual so that when a job comes on my way, then I know I am ready._ (Participant YF4)

_This is quite good for young people as we know that preparing them for school-to-work transition is so important in moulding them to be better citizens and to know what to expect when they are out of school._ (Participant DO2)

A few older youths who were out of school mentioned that they had been put through entrepreneurship and income-generation training. The participants noted that the training had created an informed understanding for them of the opportunities that engagement in entrepreneurship and income-generation poses for their economic empowerment and alleviation of poverty. Some of the youths mentioned that:

_Even though it is just a few of us who were included in entrepreneurial training, most of us youths are getting to know the benefits of entrepreneurial activity. Before the training we were not aware as to what it is all about._ (Participant YF2)

_Entrepreneurship and income-generation trainings are needed for all young people because there is a serious lack of employment options in South Africa. As young people we have desire to be economically independent and to run our own businesses and be our own bosses._ (Participant YM2)

Although a few key informants confirmed the importance of entrepreneurship and income generation, some noted that youths still preferred formal and permanent employment. An NGO practitioner and a DSD narrative are as follows:
Most of our youths are just interested in employment, they do not see their potential as entrepreneurs. I think us the NGOs and government have not done enough work to help youths understand that there are opportunities for good livelihoods in entrepreneurship. (Participant NP5)

Most entrepreneurs in this community are men, and this makes the girls not to have confidence. You can see that girls are mainly interested in office jobs and in being waiters and till operators. (Participant DO1)

5.6 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS AND/OR FAILURE OF COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

Main themes, sub-themes and categories generated from the data on factors that influence the success and/or failure of the CSP in resource-constrained settings are presented in table 8.

Table 8: Main themes, sub-themes and categories on factors that influence the success and/or failure of CSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
<td>Complexities in planning and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Programme is labour-intensive and time-consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative society</td>
<td>• Fear and resistance to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• High levels of community ignorance about harmful gender norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Build supportive environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unattainable graduation benchmarks</td>
<td>• Unrealistic and unattainable graduation benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• High levels of poverty and low levels of income linked to most programme weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Networks and linkages</td>
<td>• Strengthen partnerships with potential business and entrepreneurship partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish youth mentorship platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The CSP is still the way to go</td>
<td>• Continue programme implementation, with adjustments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Potential platform to deliver change in communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.6.1 Main Theme 1: Challenges

The sub-themes below relate to the challenges:
5.6.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Planning and preparation

Participants, namely key informants, reported that the CSP requires intensive planning and preparation as the programme relies on collaborations and the pulling together of efforts by different stakeholders that include the NGOs, funders, DSD, DOH, clinics and the communities. They explained that stakeholder engagement, mobilisation of resources, community engagements as well as recruitment and enrolment of programme beneficiaries were time-consuming activities. An NGO practitioner reported that:

_We spend a lot of our time ensuring that we talk to all relevant people before we even start the programme. Remember you must involve clinics and schools because this is where you will refer or get the kids to be involved in the programme._ (Participant NP6)

A DSD official confirmed that consultations between NPOs and DSD indeed consume a lot of time before the programme start. She stated that:

_We had lots of time-consuming meetings with the NGOs before they even started implementing as we had to agree on several issues, especially on how the programme was going to fit into the scope of what the NGOs are mandated to offer. And by the end of the day, we all agreed that the programme was going to benefit the community and contribute to the priorities of the department._ (Participant DO4)

Community mobilisation was mentioned by NGO practitioners as another time-consuming preparatory activity. The following quotes from some NGO practitioners summarise the point:

_We cannot carry out this programme without talking to the community first. Some of the things we discuss with the youths are regarded as taboo by some parents. Imagine telling a teenager about condoms, contraceptives, and family planning. Some parents might not like it and they might attack our organisation. So, you must_
tell them before starting the programme so that they are not shocked and caught by surprise. (Participant NP1)

We conduct meetings with parents, local schools, and clinics as well as the youths themselves to explain the programme. Although this takes time, it helps to ensure that only appropriate participants are recruited. (Participant NP3)

Recruitment and capacitation of programme facilitators and mentors were also cited as an important planning and preparatory activity that demands a lot of effort. An NGO practitioner explained that:

*The most important resource is the people who run the programme. Interviewing and getting the right people is not an easy process. The mentors and facilitators need to be well trained to run the programme, and that takes a lot of effort.* (Participant NP2).

5.6.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Conservative society

Some youths and NGO practitioners reported that certain people in their communities had not completely accepted some of the programming content of the CSP due to ingrained societal norms pertaining to gender roles and sexual practices. A few female youths described how difficult it was to discuss issues of contraceptives and family planning with their parents. A female youth reported that, due to societal norms, her mother treats her brother quite differently on the same issues of contraceptives and family planning. Below is what she said:

*It is funny that I cannot even talk to my mother about contraceptives or family planning at my age as she will shout at me. If she sees any contraceptives in my room, I know I am in trouble. But my brother who is younger than me can carry condoms with him, only for my mother to tell him to be careful because she will not financially support him if she impregnates someone. So, you see, it is difficult for us as girls to implement what we learn in the sessions because we do not have enough support at home.* (Participant YF2)

Another female youth shared her experiences:
The programme teaches us about using both male and female condoms. This information is not available at home or elsewhere in the community as it is taboo to have those discussions. (Participant YF5)

An NGO practitioner confirmed that the programme could achieve much more if it were not for some cultural or societal expectations that put female youths on the backburner. The practitioner said:

The girl child still faces many difficulties. Even if she might want to put into practice what is taught in the programme, the voices at home will tell her something else. She is told that she must do house chores because she is a girl and that she cannot be seen carrying contraceptives. Although a few parents are gradually changing because of the programme, the majority still carry those beliefs. So, the girl child will still have several vulnerabilities when it comes to HIV. (Participant NP5)

5.6.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Unattainable graduation benchmarks

Participants, most notably key informants, noted that the HIV prevention component of the CSP was easier for youths to achieve, as they were generally able to explain how they would put into practice the knowledge and skills they had acquired to protect themselves from HIV. However, the same could not be said for the economic strengthening component. Participants noted that economic strengthening was blighted with many challenges that made it difficult to achieve the envisaged minimum graduation benchmark for youths, that is, improved financial stability.

Lack of access to financial resources was cited as an obstacle that hindered youths from starting any form of savings, budgeting, and banking. Some participants shared their experiences as follows:

I do not see the advantages of having participated in the financial education as I do not have any money or income to practise any saving, budgeting, and banking. (Participant YM4)

Unfortunately, I am just a school child with no money to spend so I cannot say I am using what we were taught. Young people in this community do not have any money to spend because our parents are poor. (Participant YF2)
We do not even have bank accounts as we are not working, and we have no money for banking charges and deposits. Banks demand many documents that we do not have. The proof of residence that they need is difficult to produce when we are living in a shack. We do not have identity documents to open the bank accounts. Banks in our township want identity documents and not birth certificates. (Participant YM9)

A few NGO practitioners agreed that the lack of financial resources for youths to practice savings, budgeting, and banking was a challenge for the programme. One practitioner said:

Our youths are not able to start any savings or open bank-accounts because they come from poor backgrounds. Most of their parents depend on state grants so it is difficult for them to give anything to the youths. (Participant NP6)

Employability was also noted to be unattainable for youths. Some youth participants noted that the programme had not placed any participants in wage employment, especially those of their colleagues who had matriculated and were available and ready for employment. One youth described the experience as follows:

We have some matriculants in our group whom the NGO has not been able to link me to employment. If that is not improved the matriculants will not do anything with their lives and teenage pregnancies and diseases will continue. (Participant YM10).

A few NGO practitioners also bemoaned the inability of the programme to link youths to employment opportunities. Some of the NGO practitioners explained that:

There are no industries in the communities to employ young people, and even if our youths go to look for work in the big towns they do not get employed because they do not have the skills to get the advertised jobs. After matric most girls end up getting work as domestic workers or cleaners and they complain that the wages are too low. Some of the girls become pregnant as they do not get jobs. (Participant NP2)

In this poor community youth need jobs after acquiring all this knowledge from the NGOs. If this does not happen the youths will not have hope or motivation to change hazardous sex practices. (Participant NP4)
Some NGO practitioners and some youth participants also lamented that entrepreneurship and income generation was difficult to realise for youths because of high levels of poverty and lack of clear-cut opportunities in the communities. An NGO practitioner said:

*There are no investments to help with entrepreneurship and income generation components of the programme. Our youths feel dissatisfied with the outcomes. When they leave the programme, their morale is low.* (Participant NP3)

In agreement with the above statement by the NGO practitioner, some youths mentioned that:

*The programme does not provide us with start-up capital to implement our business ideas. So, though the girls might want to stop dating blessers, they are at times forced to do that because they do not have a choice.* (Participant YM1)

*Entrepreneurship training teaches us to start our businesses to be able to look after ourselves. However, we do not have money to invest in businesses. You will see that some girls are still dependent on older men, and they expose themselves to HIV infection.* (Participant YM6)

### 5.6.2 Main Theme 2: Opportunities

The sub-themes below relate to the Opportunities:

- Networks and linkages; and
- The CSP is still the way to go.

#### 5.6.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Networks and linkages

Throughout the study, the need to establish effective networks, linkages, relationships, partnerships or collaborations with businesses organisations and financial agencies, was cited by many participants as an opportunity that the NGOs should be pursuing to increase the effectiveness of the CSP, especially the economic strengthening objectives. All categories of participants explained that bringing in business, entrepreneurial and employment agencies to support the economic strengthening activities of the programme would create an enabling environment for youths to pursue
their innovative business ideas and employment prospects. The following quotes represent what some NGO practitioners reported:

We wish we were able to work with groups and organisations that can give money for youths to start their projects. Business ideas are nothing without funding. (Participant NP6)

There is more that government agencies can do to work with NGOs in helping youths. The NYDA which is funded by government to link youths to jobs and training opportunities is not even supporting us. We have tried to contact them, but nothing came up. (Participant NP4)

It is not only about having networks that can give us money for youths to have capital for their business or entrepreneurship ideas, but we also need networks that we can work with to give our youths practical mentorship and coaching on developing a business plan. (Participant NP6)

Whilst concurring that networks and linkages are essential for the programme to be successful, a DSD official added that NGO practitioners do not have sufficient networking skills. She maintained that:

NGOs should have associations with microfinance institutions and businesses who can fund and support entrepreneurship opportunities for youths. They are not achieving much so far because they do not know how to approach those institutions. (Participant DO2)

Some youths equally mentioned linkages with the business world as something that the programme should prioritise. This is represented in the quotes below:

After receiving the training, me, and my friends we discovered that we could not do anything about our idea to start a catering company. The programme could not link us to any company to help us. They should try and get some people to help us with our ideas. (Participant YF5)

The NGOs should have networks to help young people with internet café fees and money for transport for work-seeking activities. We really think more help is needed. (Participant YM8)
5.6.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Combination approach still the way to go

When asked whether there was anything else that could be done to enhance or help them realise their aspirations through the CSP, many youth participants intimated that, notwithstanding the challenges associated with economic strengthening activities, they found the programme to be truly significant to them as it gave them knowledge and skills on sexual health and financial management. Below are excerpts from some of the youths:

*Without this programme I would not have gained the knowledge I have now. The hair salon I have now is because of the knowledge and skills I got from the programme. This programme is good for young girls.* (Participant YF9)

*I can say I was developed holistically, I gained knowledge on how not to get infected with HIV and economically I learnt about financial capabilities. This knowledge has changed me because I now know good ways of getting money and at the same time, I now understand the importance of protected sex. This programme should continue for us so that we do not forget the good things we are taught.* (Participant YM1)

Sentiment was expressed by youth participants that the CSP was a necessary programme as it was creating a community of practice by bringing together youths and facilitators to learn and grow from each other. One youth verbalised the sentiment as follows:

*I have discovered that I am not alone in some of my problems. Attending sessions at the NGO has made me meet new friends and facilitators who are always there for me, and I really appreciate this. We are developing and learning from each other.* (Participant YF7)

Some NPO practitioners and a DSD official concurred that the CSP should be maintained, as it was an engaging, multi-sectoral and integrated approach with many benefits for youths. A practitioner said that:

*Combining economic and HIV prevention education is the way to go for our youths so that they can see the big picture. Our programme is a very good as it brings...*
different services and sectors together to change the lives of young people.

( Participant NP3)

Key informants pointed out that the CSP should be permanent, as it was (and is) relevant in tackling topical challenges that South Africa is battling. One NGO practitioner noted that the programme was bringing male and female youths together to start conversations about HIV, SRH, GBV and unemployment. The NGO practitioner put it that:

*I always find the discussion scenarios between girls and boys quite interesting for me to observe. It helps them to teach and speak to each other regarding issues of GBV, unemployment, HIV and SRH. These are serious problems in our country. This programme should continue because it is all about addressing these issues.*

( Participant NP4)

A DSD official was of the view that the CSP was a structured and strategic intervention that rallies all stakeholders to put their heads together to address challenges faced by youths, who are the soul and future of the nation. The official said:

*For us as government we find a well-structured programme like this to be very good because it looks at all important issues that affect our youth in South Africa, and we all know the youths are the future of the country. The programme needs all of us, government, NGOs, clinics, business, and the private sector to work together look after and support our youths.*

( Participant DO3)

5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the findings of the study. Themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the findings were presented with the support of direct quotes from participants. The next chapter discusses these findings in line with the study’s goal and objectives, as well as the research questions. In the discussion, the theoretical framework and literature that underpinned the study are of paramount importance.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter critically discusses the findings of this study (presented in Chapter Five) concerning the experiences of youth participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province. Bibliographical characteristics of participants and the profiles of the NGOs that participated in the study are discussed first. Thereafter, the six main themes that came from the findings are discussed per the study’s goal, objectives, and research questions. In the discussion, the Empowerment Theory that underpinned the study is used to understand and interpret the findings, which are compared to and contrasted with relevant findings from the literature. The chapter concludes by way of a summary.

6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

This section discusses the bibliographical characteristics of participants. It also describes the profiles of the NGOs that participated in the study.

6.2.1 Youths

All youths who partook in the study qualified as ‘youth’ as they were aged 15 to 24 years. South Africa’s NYP’s (2020–2030) definition of youth was applied in this study. In this policy, the DWYPD (2021) distinguishes youths as young people, male or female, aged between 14 and 35 years. This definition of youth is consistent with the one provided in the African Youth Charter, which defines youths as people aged between 15 to 35 years (African Union Commission, 2006).

All the youths (30) were Black; this lack of representation of other races can be attributed to the corrosive effect of the apartheid system that razed down multiracial settlements in preference for settlements separated by race. Unfortunately, Black people were mainly confined to poor distant townships, where most remain to date.

It is also noted that most (18) of the youths were female. The researcher notes that this enrolment gender disaggregation is a commendable aspect of the CSP, as it has been long established that women in South Africa experience a disproportionate HIV burden throughout the life cycle. The HSRC (2021) notes that gender disproportions
are commonly observed among AGYW that are between the ages of 15 to 24 years, whose exposure to HIV infection is three times higher than that of their male colleagues (10.2% compared to 3.4%).

Findings further show that very few (3) of the youths were employed. One can maintain that the findings highlight the poverty, inequality, and social and economic exclusion experienced by youths in resource-constrained communities because of the historical imbalances in the country. The QLFS for the first quarter of 2022 by Stats SA (2022a) confirms this by noting that young people between the ages of 15 to 24 years accounted for 63.9% of the 34.5% of those not employed. Stats SA (2022a) further claims that those between 15 to 24 years from poor communities are extremely vulnerable in the context of the labour market in South Africa.

The fact that only a few (3) youths who partook in the study were in tertiary education could be a pointer that most youths in resource-constrained settings have no means to obtain higher-level education. The chances of youths finding employment are lower when they do not have the prerequisite skills wanted by the employment market. Stats SA (2022a) recognises education as a key instrument in human capital development and observes that without education, the high youth unemployment rates will persist. Considering that unemployment, inadequate education, HIV, gender disparity, and poor economic participation are cited as the major challenges facing youths from resource-poor settings, programmes such as the CSP that focus on remediating the behavioural and socio-economic elements that contribute to the challenges are deemed as appropriate for the communities.

6.2.2 Non-Governmental Organisation practitioners

Findings indicate that all the NGO practitioners (6) that took part in the study were female. This may be anticipated, as females presently outnumber males in the social welfare sector. These findings concur with Fischl’s (2013), that social welfare professions are typically considered to be feminine by males as many of the jobs encompass helping people to deal with their hidden emotional insecurities, which is at variance with the backgrounds of most men, who were discouraged to exhibit feelings and emotions as they grew up. The significance of gender in the founding and/or management of NGOs is confirmed by Moshabela et al. (2013). Their study of NGOs
in poor settings of South Africa found that of 61 NGOs in total, 42 (69%) were founded by women. It must be observed that, although the findings and literature substantiate the argument that gender roles are learned and have an impact on the selection of occupations, it is important to promote the interest of boys and young men in social welfare professions, beginning in the home, if men are to be empowered as change agents in gender mainstreaming.

Regarding age, findings show that the majority (4) of the NGO practitioners were over 40 years, with two being in the age bracket of 50 to 59 years. It is established that four of the NGO practitioners are the founders of their NGOs. Some of the NGO practitioners stated that they did not have any formal qualifications. They explained that their passion and motivation drove them to start the NGOs to attend to the needs and interests of their societies. The findings are comparable to those made by Moshabela et al. (2013), that some of the elderly women who had founded NGOs could not read or write. Therefore, based on this aspect, it can be said that some NGO practitioners need a lot of capacity building and support to competently implement multidimensional programmes, such as the CSP.

6.2.3 Department of Social Development officials

Of the five DSD officials that participated in the study, only one is male. These findings further confirm what has been highlighted already regarding the gender ratios of people that are in the social welfare professions. Findings also show that four of the DSD officials are under the age of 39. The absence of those aged 40 and above may be an indication that social workers of those ages would most likely have progressed to assuming senior management positions in government entities or the private social welfare sector. Regarding the number of years of experience implementing the CSP, findings show that the majority (4) of DSD officials had over four years of experience, making them information-rich participants for this study.

6.2.4 Non-Governmental Organisations' profiles

Findings show that all six NGOs have been in operation for a period ranging between 15 to 22 years. It is further revealed that all the NGOs were primarily founded in response to the HIV pandemic. The findings support what is pointed out in prevailing
literature, that the thickening burdens that HIV brings on households and communities necessitated the origins of many NGOs in South Africa, as they tried to react to the pandemic, either on their own or in collaboration with the government. One observes that, besides supporting and caring for people that are already infected by HIV, many NGOs in South Africa have since diversified their programmes to include more innovative and preventive initiatives that help empower poor people to gain control of their lives. A distinct feature of all the NGOs that partook in this study is that they are local CBOs, which presents an advantage for reaching and mobilising communities and implementing programmes at lower costs.

As far as the experience of implementing the CSP is concerned, findings show that the NGOs have experience that ranges between four to six years. By implementing the CSP, a programme that has been aptly described as agile and sophisticated by some authorities, the researcher notes that the NGOs are prepared to be flexible and to learn new ways of doing things to address challenges in resource-poor settings. Findings also show that, although all the NGOs receive government funding through DSD, the funding is insufficient, inconsistent, and unreliable – leading to the NGOs sourcing for external donor funds. The CSP interventions in all the NGOs are supported through funding from USAID. It could be argued that programmes such as the CSP bring out the complementarity of purpose between NGOs, government, and donors in delivering health, economic, financial, and psychological empowerment to marginalised communities. However, critics such as Asuelime (2017) caution against donor agenda setting and sustainability problems that might emerge because NGOs are overly reliant on donor resources.

6.3 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE YOUTHS REGARDING THE BENEFITS OF COMBINING ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES AND HIV PREVENTION EDUCATION FOR YOUTHS IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS OF GAUTENG

This section of the chapter focuses on the first objective of the study, namely to establish the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng. The discussion is structured around the two main
themes that emerged, namely the benefits of combined activities for youths, and the empowerment of AGYW.

6.3.1 Benefits of combined activities for youths

The study findings reveal that the approach of simultaneously integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities that are followed in the CSP is considered beneficial for youths. It is noted that NGO practitioners and DSD officials regard the combined approach as having a greater effect when compared to standalone programmes that they have implemented before, which they described as having focussed on single or narrower outcomes. For the NGO practitioners and DSD officials, the transformative benefits of the programme lie in focusing on broader outcomes and addressing the multitude of intertwined socio-economic and health constraints that nudge youths to engage in unsafe practices as a survival mechanism and escapism tactic.

A couple of interpretations can be drawn from these findings. One can suggest that the findings highlight the understanding of the importance of holistic empowerment for youths, which has grabbed the attention of many a development practitioners in Africa at present. In other words, the findings could be an illustration that there is comprehension by participants of the premise of the CSP: that there is an undeniable link between economic marginalisation and the practice of risky behaviours by youths and, that these two issues need to be jointly addressed. This is because addressing them separately might be tantamount to treating symptoms instead of the problems’ root causes.

These findings coherently align with those from previous studies, which show that integrated programming to improve socio-economic conditions and health outcomes is worthily scaling up as part of endeavours to arrest the ever-escalating, pressing and disproportionate health and socio-economic challenges that most disadvantaged youths face. From case studies of empowerment and livelihoods programmes for youths in Uganda and Tanzania, Banks (2015) notes that effective programmes that improve youths’ social and economic opportunities are those that not only transform their behaviours but also help them to access the resources, links, and opportunities that they need to effectively counteract the disabling social and economic factors in
their lives. Corroborative findings also come from a youths assets study that was conducted in South Africa by Graham et al. (2019). It asserts that improving youths’ knowledge of sexual reproductive health is commendable but can never be a panacea on its own as it overlooks the need of addressing poverty and economic exclusion, well-known drivers of risky behaviours (Graham et al., 2019). The authors further point out that sustainable behavioural change among youths is entirely dependent on arming them with health and economic skills that they require to inform the decisions that they must make about their lives. This researcher finds it noteworthy that this is the philosophy that underpins the Empowerment Theory, as the theory also acknowledges the connectedness that exists between one’s economic standing and exposure to disease or health vulnerabilities. It can thus be added that sustainable empowerment and transformation can be amplified by simultaneously pursuing both social and economic self-improvement goals.

Another finding of this study is that the CSP is regarded as a time and cost-effective programme that ‘stretches’ investments by utilising less resources to reach and service youths. This could be because when the economic strengthening and HIV prevention sessions are offered concurrently, it reduces the number of trips and scheduling spans that programmes undertake. The same cannot be said of standalone interventions. The argument on the cost-effectiveness of the CSP can also be favoured when one considers that the programme is designed to improve the SRH knowledge of the youths. There is evidence that explains that poor SRH knowledge is key to driving risky health-related practices. By this logic, it stands to reason that equipping youths with SRH knowledge will enable them to make prudent decisions, thereby leading to potential reductions in HIV cases and early pregnancy incidences. Reduced rates of youth pregnancy and HIV infections mean that in the short- and long-run the government has a good opportunity to save some money on treatment programmes. An argument can also be made that the cost-effectiveness niche in the CSP is attainable when a positive spill-over effect across families and communities is experienced when youths are empowered. A central assumption in the Empowerment Theory is that empowered individuals make good decisions and, in the process, transform practices for the good of their families and communities as they become agents of change.
Findings reveal that the programme intentionally and strategically targeted and recruited youths that were considered to possess escalated economic and HIV vulnerabilities. The use of a risk and vulnerability assessment tool enabled the programme to identify and enrol the most eligible youths, thereby bearing the advantage of tailoring the programme structure and content to fit the youths’ concerns and aspirations. The youth themselves viewed the explicit targeting of the programme as systematic and advantageous in identifying the neediest youths in their communities.

Study findings indicate that the programme might have equipped and empowered the youths with the abilities to adapt behaviour and sexual practices that curtail exposure to HIV infection and improve their health and well-being. Some youths explained that, through participation in the programme, they have gained knowledge to negotiate for safe sex and how to access family planning services. These findings help us to understand the stance that has been advanced by many sources - that economic strengthening and HIV-prevention education approaches are most likely to produce improved benefits/outcomes for youths when combined versus when they are delivered separately.

In a study to assess the outcome evidence of running economic activities and interventions on HIV prevention with youths that are vulnerable in poor countries, Lee et al. (2019) established that by giving youths the knowledge and skills to reduce sexual risk-taking behaviour, multisectoral approaches have the potential to help the youth re-imagine their future, unbridled by disease and poverty. Another study that merges well with these findings is Bermudez et al.’s (2018), which concluded that multiple economic and HIV interventions seem effective in developing Ugandan youths’ psychosocial skills by exposing them to peer networks and support systems. The same study also noted that integrated programmes are significant in increasing youths’ economic knowledge and skills through exposure to informational resources.

The findings of this study lay bare the relevance of youth empowerment in addressing HIV and economic challenges, two intrinsically interlinked pandemics in South Africa. Presently, in line with its development agenda, the South African government has presented youth empowerment as being core to its priorities. This lends support to the views expressed by the NYP, that promoting positive sexual behaviour change and
personal empowerment of youths is important as youths are the future of South Africa. It may also be observed that the integrated economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities of the CSP are aligned with the NSP GOAL 4 (SANAC, 2017), which seeks to address HIV, TB and STIs drivers, and associates its objectives with the NDP, as authored by the NPC (2012).

The provision of HIV prevention and economic strengthening knowledge and skills by the CSP was noted by participants to have left youths feeling competent to transform their lives in terms of preventing HIV and pursuing economic opportunities. This concurs with Alsop and Heinsohn’s (2005, p. 5) definition of empowerment, which is “enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make effective choices and convert these choices into actions and outcomes”. It could further be said that, through the integrated activities of the programme, youths are presented with life choices, and they are given the skills to implement the choices for the betterment of their health and socio-economic conditions.

In the discipline of social work, the concept of empowerment is understood as “a value, a philosophy, a general paradigm, and a framework for practice” (Parsons, 1998, p. 204); as the process increases interpersonal networks with people coalescing and supporting each other for the betterment of their lives. In this study, it is noted that a significant benefit of the CSP was that the programme championed local capacity building as programme participants (youths) and programme facilitators or trainers were all recruited from the local communities. These findings imply that participants are appreciative that the programme promotes access to social and financial opportunities for local people. Further, these findings have some similarities with Fewer et al.’s (2013) views, that sustainable empowerment programmes are those that go beyond the attainment of programme outputs and outcomes by seeking to encourage social integration, employment, and access to poverty eradication opportunities.

It is fascinating to observe that the programme’s group process, training and activities were reported as having helped to cultivate and promote a sense of socio-emotional belonging and mutual purpose amongst the youths. Based on this, it could be emphasised that, by innovatively integrating activities, the CSP might have provided an opportunity structure that galvanises the youths to leverage their peer connections.
Not only did the peer partnerships or relationships seem to broaden the youths’ understanding of HIV prevention skills and financial capabilities, but it also seems to help with attracting, engaging, and retaining youths in the programme. The study findings are supportive of the encouragement by PEPFAR (2017) and UNAIDS (2018), that the empowerment of youths in modern days demands that programmes use techniques that are inclusive and innovative rather than conversational.

It was also found that some participants regard the CSP as offering them a safe space to connect with peers and give each other psychosocial support. It is most likely that participants characterise the programme in this manner because it makes them feel physically and emotionally safe and connected. It may also be because the programme allows for a fun, attractive and conducive environment for the expression of fears, desires, and dreams by participants. This agrees with the views of Mabaso et al. (2018) that, youths programmes should empower youths to build trusting relationships and friendships as that helps them to be open on issues such as sex and SRH. UNAIDS (2019) states that programmes that promote youths’ psychosocial support in their design achieve multiple outcomes and improvements across their other domains. This is in strong agreement with the Empowerment Theory, which pays homage to psychosocial support; when people have a connected social support circle, they have a sense of their worth and dignity, and they feel they have been provided with the opportunities to express their real needs, desires, hopes, and frustrations. This results in them sharing skills and teaming up to solve problems that affect them.

An interesting finding of the study is that some youths who were living with HIV found the programme to have played a central role in facilitating disclosure of their status between themselves and their families. It could be that the sessions and peer support groups that the youths were part of providing them with the encouragement and skills to openly express themselves. The youths also explained how established peer groups enabled the building of support, trust, communication and honesty amongst them, attributes that could have prepared the youths for disclosure discussions with their parents and families. There are studies (Madiba & Diko, 2021; Gachanja et al., 2014) that have shown that the process of disclosure is emotionally and socially complex, especially in cases where the youths were born with HIV. Parents, families,
and the youths experience uncertainty which stems from fears of negative consequences from disclosure, such as psychological problems, and stigma.

There is abundant research (Mutambo & Hlongwana, 2019; Kalembo et al., 2018) that highlights how young people do not get adequate emotional support from their parents; this makes their peer support networks very valuable platforms. It might be inferred that access to peer support in the CSP might have accorded youths living with HIV some space and privacy that made them feel comfortable to share and discuss personal issues and problems, including their HIV-positive status.

These findings are also corroborated by those from a research study that was conducted in the City of Cape Town by Rencken et al. (2021). The authors reviewed the functions of peer networks in offering ART adherence support and psychosocial encouragement for adolescents living with HIV. Rencken et al. (2021) established that increasing self-acceptance and peer support gave youths the confidence to nurture fundamental and meaningful relationships with their caregivers, which culminated in disclosures. The same study also established that the psychosocial support received from peers bolsters mental health, and helps youths embrace their HIV statuses and seek to live fulfilling lives with HIV. The data show that the psychosocial care that youths receive from programmes such as the CSP empowers and motivates them to be ART adherent. CSP’s ability to empower youths living with HIV with skills that influence HIV status disclosure could be said to be central to influencing their choices and access to health services. The more the youths can hold open discussions about health and with their sexual partners, the more they are likely to engage in safe sex. These views are supportive of the submission by Rencken et al. (2021); after disclosure, youths living with HIV can be persuaded to seek treatment and strive to live healthier lives whilst positively contributing to their communities.

**6.3.2 Empowerment of adolescent girls and young women**

The findings of the study reveal that the integrated HIV prevention and economic strengthening activities of the CSP might be a vehicle for the advancement of the empowerment of AGYW. Through their interaction with males in the programme, female youths stated that they had enhanced their understanding and awareness of the reasons why, as females, they are most vulnerable when compared to their male
agemates. It is observed that the mixed-gender sessions of the CSP might have led to both female and male youths engaging in critical reflections on gender roles and inequalities. It can also be suggested that the mixed-gender sessions might be refreshing and empowering to female youths as they narrowed down the widening non-binary gender discussions by having male youths accept their privilege and spreading awareness for inclusivity. The reflections might have resulted in female youths obtaining a more articulate portrait of the toxic nexus of patriarchy and gender norms, from the perspective of male youths. Such introspection from their male counterparts could have made female youths more knowledgeable of how gender norms promote differential access to health and socio-economic opportunities. Additionally, it might be deduced that such an enhanced understanding of gender norms might have equipped female youths with the knowledge that they need to build their confidence to confront and challenge gender norms that contribute to their vulnerability, either in their families or communities.

The findings above are supportive of the views of Banks (2015); in some contexts, girls and boys may benefit from co-education when participating jointly and understanding the perspectives, challenges, and priorities of peers of a different gender. The findings are also comparable to those reported by Malapi et al. (2019) whose study of mixed-gender projects established that projects that combine females and males generate higher quality outcomes in comparison to single-gender projects when it comes to empowering females with awareness and practical skills for transforming gender relations. The researchers add that the openness, partnerships, and collaborations experienced in mixed-gender projects, sessions or discussions can promote the empowerment of women, as women come to master the role that men’s attitudes and behaviours play, either as barriers or collaborators in women’s empowerment process. One can also reason that, in communities where gatekeeping is organised along patriarchal lines, mixed sessions are not only helpful in enabling the reflection of the voices, visions and realities of females, but most importantly, they prevent resentment associated with girl-only programmes.

Concerning the application of the Empowerment Theory, one can assert that the foregoing findings illustrate that access and sharing of information amongst males and females are vital in avoiding gender-blind programmes. This implies that, if males and
females listen to and value each other’s lived realities, the empowerment of women becomes indispensable as objective grounds are created to design and implement programmes that value their aspirations and needs. It can also be added that, besides fostering cooperation and empowerment complementarity, mixed-gender programmes (such as the CSP) can foster mutual accountability amongst males and females in terms of challenging and changing restrictive gender norms that put females on the backfoot.

Lack of empowerment with foundational and transferable skills such as self-confidence, communication, and decision-making, can be said to be factors that contribute to AGYW being side-lined from the employment market and/or being considered for low-paying work. Findings of this study show that the programme might have empowered some female youths by building their self-esteem and confidence as some reported that they had become more comfortable speaking in front of groups and sharing their opinions. It could be asserted that the knowledge and encouragement that the female youths received gave them self-assurance and assertiveness to communicate both their frustrations and visions for the future. These findings are in sync with those of ILO and UNICEF (2018) who investigated the factors that contribute to poor inclusion and participation in the labour market of AGYW. ILO and UNICEF (2018) established that it is crucial for girls to be empowered by communication and decision-making skills to find decent work, become entrepreneurs, pursue further training and learning, and protect themselves from diseases.

Stereotyped gender divisions of labour and restricted access and control over economic resources have been established to be colossal challenges that contribute to the disproportionate burden of poverty for AGYW. In this study, female youths applauded the programme for empowering them with finance and entrepreneurship knowledge and skills, which they said gave them equal footing with their male counterparts and would therefore help them in their quest for economic equality. Interestingly, these findings are confirmation of the intersection that is spelt out in the SDGs (UNDP, 2015), that the empowerment of marginalised AGYW and attainment of gender equality (SDG 5) is only realisable when poverty is addressed (SDG 1). Further, the findings could be said to have a strong association with the practice of social work, in general. Across all fields of practice, social workers strive to eradicate
social exclusion by the empowerment of underprivileged individuals and groups. Besides advocating for change, the profession strives to prevent, mitigate, and respond to poverty and circumstances that put AGYW at a disadvantage by implementing an array of innovative health and socio-economic approaches that empower the females, such as the CSP.

6.4 THE WAY(S) IN WHICH PARTICIPATING IN ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING AND HIV PREVENTION EDUCATION CHANGED PARTICIPATING YOUTHS’ RISK BEHAVIOUR AND SEXUAL PRACTICES

This section focuses on the second objective of the study, namely to establish the way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme (the CSP) changed the youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices. The discussion is structured around the main theme that emerged; the interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices.

6.4.1 Interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices

Findings show that the economic skills that the youths receive through teachings on how to budget, start savings and develop business ventures, are a critical factor in helping them make healthy sexual decisions as they transition into adulthood. This significant finding could be because programmes that have connections between economic knowledge and behaviour change (such as the CSP) have been found in different studies to be important, not only in strengthening economic outcomes but also in enhancing a variety of other welcome outcomes that include empowered decision-making on matters of sexual behaviour. Study findings show that many youths were able to explain how their participation in economic strengthening interventions, provided through Financial Capabilities, Employability, and Entrepreneurship modules contributed to improvement in their awareness and handling of individual and interpersonal economic factors that exacerbate their risk. It might be that the knowledge that youths acquired inspired them to understand economic avenues that they can pursue to build their livelihoods, rather than exposing
themselves to HIV vulnerability when undertaking sexual relationships and practices for financial gain.

Idleness has been discussed by various literature (Ahonsi et al., 2014; Mbirimtengerenji, 2007) to be a factor that predisposes youths to HIV-related risky sexual behaviour. Interestingly and remarkably, findings from the study highlight that the economic strengthening activities of the CSP were challenging enough to keep the youths occupied for the greater period of the time, time that they would have been idle. It could be explained that there is a probability that the training that the youths attended helped to keep them off the streets and reduced the amount of time in their hands to engage in risky sexual behaviour. This finding is confirmatory of the assertion made in a joint publication by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF (2019), that there is an undeniable link between inactivity or idleness and engaging in risky health behaviours such as having unprotected sex with multiple partners, engaging in criminal activities, and abusing alcohol and substances.

Studies by Banks (2015) also show that idleness perpetuates toxic masculinity among male youths. Banks (2015) explains that faced with inactivity or idleness, male youths search to express and highlight their masculinity. Some of the most notable avenues include having unprotected sex with multiple partners, a practice that can, unfortunately, multiply their exposure to HIV and other STIs. The study findings and literature from the studies cited above have substantial convergence with the Empowerment Theory precept of engaging the youths with ongoing learning to empower them with skills to change their behaviours whilst also capacitating them to manage the social and economic factors that put them at risk.

The study also found that the economic strengthening activities of the programme might have stirred a sense of agency and purposefulness amongst the youths, thereby creating a sense of empowerment that they could do better in their lives if they control and revise behaviour and sexual habits that put them in danger of becoming infected with diseases, especially HIV. Utilising these findings, one might argue that triggering agency and purposefulness among youths is key to empowering them to safeguard themselves and take action to change their conditions. An inference is made by various researchers, such as Johnson et al. (2016), that youths empowered with economic knowledge and abilities will not engage in risky sexual behaviour and
practices, such as cross-generational and transactional, instead preferring the pursuit of other economic coping mechanisms.

The findings are also aligned to observations made by Banks (2015); the future of youths appears bleak and limited as it is not clear whether they will ever experience conditions of open opportunities that will contribute to them living lives laden with high hope aspirations; elements that are regarded as essential in promoting responsible sexual behaviour and practices. It can also be reasoned that lack of agency and purposefulness has other broader social implications for youths, such as reinforcement of their exclusion of youths, and perpetuation of negative stereotyping. In addition, and as a result, the considerable stress, vulnerabilities, and anxieties that the youths put up with might lead to hazardous health-related practices that can culminate in substance abuse, unplanned pregnancy, and increased cases of STIs such as HIV.

Other various studies agree with the findings and assertions made above. In their study in Zimbabwe to determine factors associated with HIV risk, Pascoe et al. (2015) established that economic vulnerability in youths can inhibit their agency when making decisions related to sexual activities, which can intensify their risk of HIV. An important recommendation made in their study is that to reduce exposure to HIV infection, there is a need to increase efforts to empower marginalised youths with integrated knowledge and skills that dismantle economic barriers. Another complementary study is that of Moret et al. (2018), which established that economic strengthening interventions are a core pre-requisite for building HIV protective and risk reduction assets. The study explained that individuals with economic strengthening aptitude are most likely to concentrate their efforts and time on achieving the long-term goals that they set themselves, rather than engaging in risky sexual practices, which would be discrepant to their goals. In the same vein as the CSP, it could be observed that both studies by Pascoe et al. (2015) and Moret et al. (2018) indicate that promoting economic strengthening mechanisms may be a potentially viable avenue for assisting young people in poor communities to desist from engaging in risky sexual practices.

The relevance of the Empowerment Theory is brought to the fore in the findings and the literature reviewed above. The theory demands youth programmes to prioritise the building of youths’ agency, action, and engagement in change efforts (Richards-
Schuster et al., 2018). Regarding this study, it suffices to observe that, because of engagements and information acquired from the CSP, youths are observed to want to be active agents in influencing factors that predispose them to poverty and unemployment. It could be said that due to their participation in the programme, the youths can discern the factors that consequently place them at risk of adopting sexual behaviour and practices that put their lives in jeopardy. In their paper that discusses the association between empowerment and development outcomes, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005, p. 8) note that “the extent or degree to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make a purposive choice)”. They add that information availability is one of the assets that must be used as an indicator of agency. Thus, by providing youths with context-specific information targeted at pushing youths out of poverty, the economic strengthening activities of the CSP could be judged to be empowering to the youths.

It can also be observed that the CSP is in consonant with the principles of the SDGs, South Africa’s Bill of Rights as spelt out in the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and UNAIDS’s 95-95-95 targets and Fast-Track approach (UNAIDS, 2015). These international and domestic instruments call for structural changes to enable the requisite empowerment of youths, especially AGYW, with the agency to claim and participate in economic activities, live life to the fullest, and have options to safeguard themselves against HIV. There is a clear illustration from the findings that youths in marginalised settings possess inner strength. With sufficient guidance and information, they are willing to reshape the course of their circumstances by becoming experts in their lives, consequentially pursuing new practices that safeguard their health and their lives. It is also interesting to note that the tenets espoused in the findings above are in sync with principles considered fundamental in the practice of social work, especially self-determination, purposeful expression, and involvement.

Another significant finding that came from the study pertains to the perceived role that economic strengthening activities of the CSP play in stemming gender-based inequalities. These inequalities consign AGYW to socio-economic vulnerability, which subsequently contributes to their risky sexual behaviour. Opportunities provided by economic strengthening activities are observed to have endowed some youths with a new understanding of their circumstances by making them aware of power relations
and the roles they could play to influence their relations. The economic strengthening activities of the programme might have enhanced the capabilities of the female youths to make independent sexual decisions, as the programme had taught them that females should be proactive in exploring their full potential in economic decisions and activities, rather than being dependent on male partners as a means of earning a living.

The findings above concur with Chauke and Obadire’s (2020) work. The authors explored gender differentials/motivations in entrepreneurship as an economic survival strategy among both female and male youths in South Africa. The researchers found that gender restrictions and associated social and cultural norms were inclined to generate hindrances for women to fully partake in mainstream economic activities, thereby decreasing the abilities of women to negotiate safer sex, as they become reliant on their male intimate partners to make decisions about their own lives. Further, the study noted that, in South Africa, there are very few women who are in the entrepreneurial field because of the unique challenges they face. These challenges include poor self-confidence to succeed in business because of the societal and cultural stereotyping that characterises them as weak and lacking in assertiveness when compared to men. These widespread gender-based social inequalities and challenges were noted to worsen the exposure of female youth to HIV and other STIs.

As a result of entrenched gender inequalities in communities, SDG 5 stresses the importance of focusing on attaining gender equality and empowerment for all AGYW. SDG 5 does this by encouraging the implementation of initiatives that ensure full and unconditional participation of women in economic opportunities to ensure their healthy lives and well-being. This researcher, therefore, views the economic strengthening activities of the CSP as an appropriate initiative seeking to address the grassroots power imbalance between genders, by empowering young women to be competent to make their determinations regarding livelihood and economic aspects of their lives. The CSP’s economic strengthening activities seem to acknowledge that relationships that are marked by financial or economic disparities often disadvantage women when it comes to negotiating condom use and practising other safer sex behaviours. In line with the Empowerment Theory, building and strengthening the economic capabilities of female youths is of strategic importance as it has been observed that economic inequality is a powerful driver and obstacle for disempowering youths, particularly
females. In application of the Empowerment Theory, it can be submitted that economically capacitating female youths is a social justice prerogative, as gender disparity within the economy is a contributor to their vulnerability.

An unexpected but intriguing finding that came from the study was that two participants, one male and one female, indicated that because of having acquired SRH information which they could use to practice safe sex, they had increased their sexual relationships and activities. The experience of these two youths can be interpreted in many ways. Firstly, the behaviour could be an indicator that the youths believe in the efficacy of the HIV prevention methods that they are taught in the programme, such as condom use. Secondly, the verbalisation of increased sexual activity could just be a sign that because they participated in the programme the two youths might have built their self-confidence and they are now able to communicate directly and openly on matters of sex. Thus, it could be said that the two youths have overcome the cultural customs that disapprove or make it taboo for one to openly discuss or disclose their sexual activities. Further, considering skewed gender relations that favour males, the ability to negotiate for safer sex by the female youths is highly commendable.

The findings above are compatible with those from Pettifor et al.’s (2018) study. The authors examined the efficacy of prevention programmes and approaches to reach the youth populations in East and Southern Africa. The researchers note that youth empowerment-based interventions that address sex norms and stigma surrounding sexuality directly present a potential solution to improve the seeking of information on health services and HIV/STI disclosures by the youths. Pettifor et al. (2018) further indicate that youth empowerment-based interventions have the potential to normalise HIV prevention, as they present opportunities for youths to discuss riskier sexual behaviours (such as promiscuity and early age sexual debuts) on platforms where they do not feel judged.

The UN (2018, p. 11) regards empowerment as “the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”. In concurrence with this view, one can assert that participation in the CSP might have provided the youths with the means and capabilities to make independent, masterful and assertive sexual decisions which they are proud of, hence they could freely verbalise their sexual activities. The fact that only two youths out of
30 disclosed their sexual activities shows that empowerment as a phenomenon is not homogeneous; it can occur and be experienced differently, whether at the individual or collective level.

6.5 THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTENDED OUTCOMES (FOR ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING) OF THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME ARE BEING MET IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

This section focuses on the third objective of the study, namely to establish the extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of the CSP are being met in resource-constrained settings. The discussion is structured around the main theme that emerged, specifically youth economic empowerment expectations.

6.5.1 Youths’ economic empowerment expectations

Findings showed that a notable number of youths acknowledged that they had received a package of services that met their expectations in terms of acquiring knowledge that prepares them for economic empowerment and potential livelihood improvement. Through the financial literacy training that was focused on saving, budgeting, and banking, it was reported by participants that their money management capabilities had improved. The findings demonstrated that, by understanding their attitude and behaviour around money, participants had obtained skills to set meaningful personal goals around money matters. Regarding employability, results show that participants’ prospects for employability had been boosted favourably by the programme’s work readiness activities. These activities taught them the skills to write job applications and CVs and conduct themselves in interviews. Concerning entrepreneurship, results show that some of the participants who took part in entrepreneurship training had gained the desire and insights to establish and own businesses.

The research findings show that participants regarded knowledge acquisition on economic abilities and skills as key criteria for assessing achievement and outcomes of participating in the CSP. The participants had hoped the programme would expose them to economic strengthening processes or activities that would increase their financial, employability and entrepreneurship knowledge and capacities, which in turn
would enable them to make choices they could pursue to reduce poverty and improve their overall welfare. The findings indirectly confirm what has been established about the interventions of the CSP; they are curriculum based, to educate and give skills to young people that will help them understand what they need to know to become effective agents of their economic empowerment. It can thus be highlighted that the programme acknowledges the association between economic strengthening skills training and education as creating opportunities for inclusion, a critical factor for youth engagement and development. Thus, by merging different factors and activities in youth programmes, youths can provide themselves with platforms to cultivate and consolidate life skills and competencies required to be thriving adults.

The findings above concur with Hallman et al.’s (2007) findings. Through their evaluation of a South African youth project that had integrated safe spaces, financial capabilities, and HIV prevention skills, they established that financial decision-making and behaviours had improved among those youths who had been part of the project. The youths who had been part of the project could confidently speak about financial aspects and they wanted to act on the teachings that they had received. For example, some acted by initiating groups for savings activities. Akin to findings from this study, participants from Hallman et al.’s (2007) study also reported increased confidence and decisiveness when it came to making decisions on spending their savings. The authors observed that participation in the intervention helped participants define their economic empowerment ambitions and goals, and as a result, put in place plans to work on them. Based on these arguments, it could be advanced that economic strengthening skills and knowledge give youths the confidence and abilities needed to make informed economic choices.

It also emerged in the study that at specific NGOs, although at a small scale, some participants had started joint savings schemes as well as running small entrepreneurship or income-generation projects, such as car washes. Despite the pursuits being quite limited in scope, the youth were able to come together in groups and create opportunities to implement the fundamental skills that they had learnt. The above-mentioned is consistent with findings from a study carried out in a couple of sub-Saharan African countries by Iwelunmor et al. (2020), which sought to establish the contribution of economic empowerment in HIV prevention projects designed to
target AGYW. The review established that economic empowerment interventions that provide avenues for youths to establish tangible economic activities had the potential to influence their decision-making in mitigating economic vulnerabilities. Against this backdrop, one can equally propound for the development of multidimensional, evidence/curriculum-based programmes that spur or enhance youth’s capabilities to identify safe and appropriate income-generating opportunities that enhance their life options.

In a rather unexpected finding that contradicts the teaching of the CSP (that entrepreneurship is a significant empowering tool that youths can creatively use to counter the national challenge of youth unemployment), it was mentioned by some participants that some youths, especially females, are only interested in employment and not entrepreneurship. It was described that these youths do not have confidence in their entrepreneurial potential, and they would prefer to be employees, working in offices, restaurants, or the retail sector. This finding is corroborated by the observations by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) (2017); the number of youths participating in entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa remains very meagre, at 6% of the youth’s total population. The ACBF (2017) adds that, besides the lack of targeted, goal-driven entrepreneurial interventions in civil society sectors, academia, businesses, and public organisations, the lack of interest in entrepreneurship by youths is attributable to them being uninformed on entrepreneurial opportunities that might be available in the economy.

It is also noted that the lack of mentorship and role models from their families and communities is a debilitating impediment that creates barriers to attracting and keeping young people interested in entrepreneurial activities. The NYP makes an over-arching call that all public and private sectors should consider the acceleration of development and implementation of collaborative plans to fight both unemployment and/or the underemployment of youths. In concurrence, it could be suggested that the virtues and potential that entrepreneurship poses as a catalyst for job creation and economic growth should be properly explained and taught to the youths to obtain their buy-in. Youth programmes, such as the CSP, still need to do more to encourage youths to choose entrepreneurship as their first career option. In addition, it can be proposed that entrepreneurship courses should be introduced in school curricula to familiarise
young people with the entrepreneurial world and provide them with the skills they need to become entrepreneurs.

Further discussion is warranted on this study’s finding that some youths prefer to be employees as opposed to entrepreneurs, for a multitude of reasons. It could be argued that career guidance is not offered early to young people in marginalised communities to help them make informed choices. As a result, and due to limited exposure, most young people relate more to lower paid, lower quality and informal jobs, thereby limiting their choices of other viable careers or professions.

It can also be reasoned that the education system that children in resource-constrained settings are exposed to does not provide them with skills required by specific labour markets (for example, social work, medicine, teaching, and accountancy). Furthermore, the education that young people are exposed to is more focused on academic performance, leading to mismatches for technical, technology and production-based jobs such as engineering, plumbing, welding, motor mechanics, e-commerce, computing, and agriculture. In concurrence with the views of ACBF (2017) (that youths from less privileged backgrounds have poorer education, thus they accept uncompetitive jobs), the researcher acknowledges the discriminatory and prejudicial educational system that the country inherited from the apartheid system cannot be ignored. Although the apartheid system in South Africa ended over 28 years ago, some researchers (Friedman, 2019; World Bank Group, 2018) have established that the system, through its social policies, continues to exclude Black children, especially from poor communities, from quality education and skilled occupations.

Therefore, a targeted education system that empowers young people with both job and entrepreneurial skills will enable them to have the autonomy to build their trajectories. In the context of this finding, one can observe that South Africa’s NDP, NYP, and the Constitution are convergent on the proposition that, the surest way of addressing historic exclusions is by intensifying the empowerment of young people, especially from poor backgrounds, by giving them the right education and skills of a modern economy that will enable them to gravitate toward competitive, high-paying jobs. Social work practitioners engaged in the economic strengthening of youths should promote self-confidence despite deficits in youths’ circumstances. The focus must be on their strengths and potential to confront and change their situations.
Even though all youth participants gained entrepreneurship knowledge which could assist them in starting a business, the study findings show that only a few (5) of the youths participated in running projects (such as selling sweets at school and car washing on street corners). However, it was noted that these small-scale income-generation projects did not result in any consequential improvement in the circumstances of the youths. The funds that they raised were paltry to realise any savings or to expand their mini-business ventures. Whereas the programme might be accredited for inspiring the youths to start income-generation projects, these findings could be an apt demonstration that there is a crucial mismatch between the entrepreneurship knowledge provided by the programme and how youths’ experiences pan out. The findings might also be an illustration that, in South Africa, entrepreneurship remains grossly underdeveloped and is not regarded as a feasible alternative by young people to empower themselves economically. The fact that less than a handful (5) of youths considered starting mini-income-generation projects could be an indicator that youths do not regard entrepreneurship to be a suitable substitution for employment. One can also suggest that the lack of income-generating projects could be an indication that the education they are given during the programme to promote entrepreneurship is not effective in stimulating interest in entrepreneurial ventures.

These findings could also be an exemplification that the lack of investment in youths’ income-generation projects is a significant structural barrier and gap that impedes youths from establishing vibrant business enterprises that match their drive and ambitions. These views are comparable to those that have been expressed by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (2013, p. 6); very few financial support programmes in South Africa “have mainstreamed the youth”. It could be explained that the programmes are found wanting when it comes to setting up the youths as prime beneficiaries, with an uninhibited say in the programmes. The programmes have also not shown enough appetite to share their targets and projected outcomes, which makes monitoring, reviewing and demanding accountability from the programmes difficult. If this is not addressed, youth entrepreneurship programmes will remain ineffective in efforts to empower, educate, and influence the youths to be entrepreneurs.
It can be asserted that the CSP should not adopt an over-simplistic view that participation in entrepreneurship training will lead to the formation of successful business enterprises by youths. The programme must address the lack of access to financial resources, a central requirement for youths to initiate enterprises. Entrepreneurship outcomes can only be strengthened when youths can put their learning into practice. However, for the youths to put their learning into motion they would require access to appropriate financial support from relevant public or private institutions.

Researchers (Plagerson & Mthembu, 2019; David et al., 2018) have rightly observed that the socio-economic problems of youths in poor settings are due to unequal distribution of, and access to resources. Thus, one can propose that the quantity and quality of youth enterprises in the CSP can be improved if the programme aligns its entrepreneurship strategies to the values of collaboration and incorporation that underlie the Empowerment Theory. Collaborating with influential economic and commercial stakeholders, such as banks and corporates, could contribute immensely to the empowerment of youths, as these entities have the wherewithal to finance start-ups for youth enterprises.

6.6 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS AND/OR FAILURE OF THE COMBINATION SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

This section of the chapter concentrates on objective four of the study, namely to explore the factors that influence the success and/or failure of the CSP in resource-constrained settings. The discussion is structured around the two main themes that emerged, specifically challenges and opportunities.

6.6.1 Challenges

Surprisingly, study findings show that the CSP did not engage with youths in the design and planning of the programme. It is noted that NGO practitioners and DSD officials view planning and preparation for programme implementation as time-consuming processes that demand a lot of effort to cultivate collaborations with stakeholders such as other NGOs, funders, DSD, DOH, clinics and schools. The NGO practitioners
explained that the mobilisation of communities and the enrolment of youths were time-consuming activities. It was interesting to note that none of the youths made any mention of the planning and preparation processes of the programme being a challenge. Therefore, it could be deduced that there was very little or no involvement of the youths in the planning and preparation for the programme, hence the youths did not make any mention of these processes that are key in determining the successful and sustained implementation of programmes.

It can be stated that the success of youth programmes such as the CSP is dependent on the implementation of transparent and inclusive programming strategies that can engage the affected youths unconditionally. The programmes should also be able to consult with government departments and communities in analysing the underlying factors that promote risk and vulnerability. Engagement of all affected parties is regarded as paramount in promoting mutual accountability. These observations are in tandem with those that are shared by Chauke and Obadire (2020), who state that the planning process for any youth programme should be inclusive, transparent and evidence informed. The authors aver that this should be done by ensuring that there is maximum participation of the youths, communities concerned, strategic government ministries, the private sector, and community and cultural leaders in the design of the programme.

The limited or absence of youth engagement in the development, planning and preparation of the CSP might be interpreted as problematic, as it violates values and principles of meaningful engagement and active participation that are fundamental in the Empowerment Theory. The Empowerment Theory abhors tokenism, a practice which entails inviting youth to a programme to give an appearance that they are being actively engaged, when in fact their input is not incorporated into the programme. The theory is instructive that an honest empowerment process involves youths, as much as possible and feasible, in all programme aspects, from the designing phase right through to implementation and management. Further, empowerment programmes or processes should have mechanisms for youth to give suggestions, and feedback that should be seriously taken into consideration as the programmes progress.

The findings and observations above are buttressed by Machingo (2018), who asserts that consultation and meaningful youth participation in the conceptualisation and
execution of socio-economic empowerment activities have the potential to excite the youths but also challenge them to realise their full potential. Thus, it is the considered view of this study that, in agreement with the precepts of Empowerment Theory, the CSP needs to earnestly co-opt the youths in designing and implementation – as this enables the youths to socially share power with the NGO practitioners, DSD officials and other stakeholders. It could be said that youths should be given leeway to check that their interests are enshrined in the programme, with the NGO practitioners and DSD officials’ roles being to establish and keep a balance by giving guidance and support without exerting authority or dominance.

It also came to light in the study that the desire by certain parents and members of the community to conserve certain cultural, social, and traditional norms and practices was making it difficult for some youths, especially female youths, to change their behaviour (based on skills learnt from the CSP). It was explained that the deep-rooted societal norms, embedded gender roles and positions, and judgemental attitude of society restrict free discussion of sexual relations, sexual practices, contraceptives, and family planning between youths and their parents; thereby leading to some youths feeling that they were not supported by their parents or communities to adopt safer sex practices that prevent them from acquiring HIV.

The repercussion of stigma and social isolation from one’s family and community were reported as real for those female participants who dared to openly talk about sex, contraceptives and/or condom use. Stigma and social isolation breed shame, loneliness and secrecy, conditions that can inflame the increase of HIV. The findings broadly support the work of other studies around GBV and social norms. Bicchieri (2017) point out that the lack of communities’ collective efforts to address harmful gender norms, patriarchy, and the reticence of men to fight GBV are plagues that fuel the spread of HIV among female youths. This is because society tends to socialise the female youths to believe that they must be reliant on males to exercise decisions on their sexual relationships and practices. However, besides the cultural norms and practices, we should not forget that in South Africa practices of discrimination against women have their roots in the former system of the apartheid government, which was characterised by patriarchy and racism.
There was a view that was expressed by some female youths that their parents treated them unfairly compared to their brothers regarding matters of sexual relations and practices. This could be attributed to society’s cultural attitudes which allow men more sexual freedom and choices than it tolerates for women. As an example, in numerous African settings, it is permissible for men to sexually experiment by engaging in multiple sexual relationships before they get married, however, the same cannot be tolerated for young women. In some cultures, society has formalised it that it should be expected for males to still have numerous sex partners, even if they are married.

In the context of the CSP, it can be asserted that these conservative values, attitudes, and cultural practices impede the advancement of efforts to afford women SRH information and resources meant to protect them from HIV. One can posit that addressing the gender imbalanced treatment of the girl child from the boy child requires broad and collective parent and community participation. It can also be suggested that youth programmes (the CSP) need to equally prioritise parents and communities by targeting them with intensive and sustained gender education if they are to change their assumptions and norms of behaviour, which influence how they perceive and treat girls and boys differently.

One can proffer that the above findings are a demonstration that the socio-economic empowerment of female youths is not a panacea to address all the challenges that put them at risk of HIV. Rather, this can be complemented by creating a social milieu that capacitates parents, families, and community members to be fully supportive of all their youths, despite their gender, if a programme is to be considered holistic and systematic. This assertion augurs well with the core belief of both the profession of social work as well as the Empowerment Theory - that to improve the situations of young people, the environment (parents and communities), needs to be extensively involved and be equally empowered to engage with the youths. Parents and communities can be a sounding board that the youths use to examine and expand their ideas aimed at building their agency and addressing the triple threats of deprivation (enabled by poverty), marginalisation (perpetuated by inequalities) and redundancy (aided by unemployment), which worsen their exposure to HIV. It is crucial to add that the empowerment of female [youths] is a key virtue for the profession of social work, especially when it considers social justice. Social justice as a value
demands that society should treat women with an equal measure to that which it treats other groups. This value is also in sync with SDG 5 which makes a call for the attainment of gender equality through unconditional empowerment of all AGYW.

Another significant challenge of the programme that was cited throughout the study is the unattainability of the economic strengthening graduation benchmarks. Findings indicate that many participants still viewed themselves as economically vulnerable and inadequately empowered to initiate and lead independent and sustainable economic lives. The challenges that dog the programme make it near-impossible to achieve the minimum benchmark of the economic strengthening intervention. Youth noted that the intervention was supposed to capacitate them with economic skills that they could use to develop some financial independence and escape the poverty trap as they transitioned into adulthood.

The programme’s inability to provide the youths with capital was observed to be another hurdle for those youths who were seeking to set up their enterprises. Lack of capital did not stop the youths from dreaming about entrepreneurship, but it thwarted their efforts to start with some form of savings, budgeting, and banking. The findings support what has been revealed by numerous researchers, that unavailable, insufficient, and unreliable capital is the biggest impediment to the attainment of economic strengthening outcomes, particularly for the youths from poor communities (Plagerson & Mthembu, 2019). Findings also show that poverty is an overarching barrier that underpins the lack of capital by the youths. Many parents in poor communities in South Africa depend on grant monies to feed and shelter their families. This implies that the parents have no means to provide any capital to the youths participating in the economic strengthening interventions.

It is also well established that due to parental poverty, and lack of collateral, youths from poor communities have difficulty accessing funding or credit lines from financial institutions. Diraditsile and Maphula’s (2020) work resonates well with the findings, as the authors point out that poverty and lack of capital or investment undermine the realisation of fruitful outcomes from economic programmes or policies aimed at the youths. The authors further advance that, youth economic capacitation programmes should not just be premised on training but should be anchored on a radical set of
measures that are comprehensive and well-coordinated to finance and resource youth initiatives.

Although employability is a module of economic strengthening, findings show that the programme had not placed any participants in wage employment. The programme was not linked to any paid job placement opportunities to back its employability training. Although youth in South Africa generally encounter a lot of obstructions to penetrating the job market, the researcher notes that many specific reasons contribute to alienation and marginalisation from employment of the youths participating in the CSP. It can be argued that the employability training received through the CSP is too generic to furnish unemployed youths with practical competencies that are required to be enlisted in the employment market. There is an irreconcilable skills mismatch between what the CSP produces and the set of capabilities or competencies that hiring employers are most interested in. This scenario contributes to graduates or participants of the CSP remaining unemployed, in the generational cycle of marginalisation and poverty.

It could also be said that the lessons that youths get on writing a CV, job application and conducting themselves in interviews are generic and do not help the youths with job-specific skills and work experience. The findings concur with those of Dagume and Gyekye (2016); their study aimed at exploring the determinants of youth unemployment in South Africa. They found that economic empowerment programmes in the country are not adequately geared to groom or equip youth with a practical set of skills that the modern-day workplace is looking for. The authors encourage youth programmes to be responsive by helping youth to acquire skills that match labour market needs by funding and linking them to apprenticeships, granting integrated learning and career-specific experience.

Various bodies, such as Stats SA (2021), concur that youths from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa are unemployed not simply because of the unavailability of paid jobs but because of a lack of skills or qualifications. It cannot be emphasised enough that, any solution or programme that seeks to address youth economic vulnerability and does not acknowledge the multiple contributions of their lack of requisite skills and competencies will not be able to sufficiently prepare the youths for the practical world of work.
The study’s findings highlight that the dearth of mentorship and coaching platforms for youths is a challenge for the programme. It was stated by some participants that a lot could be achieved if the programme had professional mentors and coaches to assist youth, especially with entrepreneurship. It is contended that should the CSP have had seasoned mentors and coaches with business acumen working with the youths on developing business plans, approaching funders and markets, and managing business income and expenses, some youths from the programme could have started stable and sustainable business enterprises of their own. Supportive findings can be deduced from a study by Lindsay et al. (2016) that reviewed the contribution of mentorship projects in aiding young people to transition from high school to adulthood. The study established that programmes with formal and structured mentorship interventions led to significant improvement in work-related outcomes for youths. Lindsay et al. (2016) found mentorship to have brought about positive outcomes because mentors performed the role of change champions in the lives of their mentees by encouraging, advising, and practically illustrating how tasks had to be done. Empowerment Theory equally views mentorship as a key component of youth empowerment. Proponents of the theory posit that youth programmes should establish authentic mentorship mechanisms that have provisions to guide the youths to critically reflect and develop a new appetite to grow by learning new insights and skills (Alsop et al., 2005).

Surprisingly, the findings did not make any direct reference to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic as an imposing challenge for the programme. The researcher is of the view that youth programmes such as the CSP have not been spared by the ravaging pandemic which has created chaos all over the world, threatening lives and disrupting livelihoods. Having worked in the NGO sector for almost two decades now, and with the advantage of hindsight and experience, the researcher feels that calamities such as the Covid-19 pandemic, tend to over-shadow development initiatives by causing the repurposing of attention and funding from community programmes, such as the CSP. These views are comparable to those that are stated in NYP (DWYPD, 2021) that, even though youths were already marginalised before the pandemic, their situation has now worsened further. The DWYPD (2021) explains further that, due to lockdown restrictions there was generally poor uptake of services related to SRH.
Further, those youths who had the initiative to look for jobs or start their enterprises could no longer do so and were thus further locked out of the economy.

Based on the Empowerment Theory, which calls for inclusion and prioritisation of the youths throughout, it should be proposed that NGOs and the government enact strategies to ensure that youth economic empowerment is not put on the sidelines, nor does it become an afterthought as the country battles the Covid-19 pandemic. With improved forecasting and planning, dedicated resources should be committed to ensuring that youth programmes always receive unfettered priority and attention. Noticeably, this proposed view of the empowerment process is aligned with many SDGs, particularly Goal 8, which calls for progressive mainstreaming of sustainable, inclusive, and equitable opportunities for economic progression, meaningful employment, and enjoyment of productive life for all.

6.6.2 Opportunities

Despite the challenges and gaps that have been discussed above, it was found that many participants considered the CSP to be a potential vehicle that could be used to establish networks and linkages that could benefit the youths. The researcher considers that this is an indication of the need for the programme to create opportunities for formally strengthening the coordination and linkages of NGOs with the various players in the business, financial and health sectors who share the same purpose of wanting to empower the youths and underprivileged communities, economically. It was disheartening for the researcher to hear some NGO practitioners stating that they reached out to the NYDA for support with no success. The NYDA is an agency that was set up by the government and is funded primarily to tackle the socio-economic challenges that are encountered by the youths, including poverty, inequality and joblessness and poor health. Some of the products and services that the NYDA offers are exactly what was cited by participants as challenges for the programme. The products and services include business management training, mentorship, and market linkages.

It must be stressed that besides the NYDA, there are other organisations and government departments which the CSP could partner/collaborate with. These include Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator; Tshepo 1 million; Department of Small
Business Development; Youth Employment Service; Department of Trade, Industry and Competition; Department of Higher Education and Training; Department of Science and Innovation; and the Department of Employment and Labour. These departments and organisations are funded by the government and some private entities, primarily to promote entrepreneurship as a way of reversing the unemployment and underemployment of youths. It is also imperative to highlight that some of these agencies can offer capacity-building training and mentorship to NGO practitioners and programme facilitators to help them increase their ability to design and implement youth interventions such as entrepreneurship. It must be noted that, besides the presence of these departments and organisations, the youths from resource-constrained settings rarely benefit due to poor collaborations and linkages between these entities and youth programmes.

These findings corroborate those by Diraditsile et al. (2020), who note that although programmes and bodies that are set up to benefit youth are relevant, they remain questionable and blighted by soaring rhetoric as they do not produce observable and trackable results. Diraditsile et al. (2020) suggest that there is a need for youth programmes and agencies to actively coordinate their efforts at various levels. Coordination, collaboration, and partnership are necessary determinants of youth empowerment. Thus, it is a strong conviction of this researcher that health and economic empowerment programmes for youths will only succeed when agencies and programmes work together as active collaborative partners, rather than in their silos.

Having had the experience of working in youth intervention in some African countries, including South Africa, this researcher notes that programmes such as the CSP offer a perfect opportunity for NGOs to collaborate and partner with universities and research institutes. These can help them set up robust, inclusive, systematic, evidence-informed, and milestone-driven monitoring and evaluation systems that they can use to track progress and to ensure proper understanding of the outcomes and impact of the programmes. The CSPs need investment, in terms of personnel and resources, if robust systems to monitor and evaluate the programme are to be set. A robust system will not only help in describing participation numbers but will also focus on and document the intermediate outcomes/impact of the programme.
It has been underlined in different studies that a lot of youth programmes, such as the CSP, use monitoring and evaluation systems that pay very little attention to the ultimate impact of the programmes on youths. It is always difficult to tell whether the creation and betterment of youths’ livelihoods and reduction in new HIV infections is ever accomplished by the programmes, despite the programmes presenting this as their ultimate intended goal. The lack of robustness in the monitoring and evaluation systems has led to some critics stating that youth programmes pay too much attention to reporting on the absolute numbers of youths that participate in sessions given in the programme’s interventions. The systems are found wanting when it comes to tracking and analysing if all the interventions produce a positive impact that contributes to the improvement of the youths’ quality of life. In the case of the CSP, being a relatively new programming approach that is still gaining traction, it would be strategic to institute monitoring and evaluation systems that can practically gather evidence and illustrate linkages and synergies between HIV and economic strengthening initiatives. It is only when the programme produces evidence of its practices and achievements that resources and commitment can be attained from different sectors.

The importance of the relationship between empowerment, monitoring and evaluation cannot be overemphasised. The UN (2018) states that empowerment can be elusive to define, as is often the case with other such concepts in the field of social science. One can argue that, as an ongoing pre-planned process, empowerment should revolve around critical reflection to enable the better measurement and monitoring of programmes. Besides detailing how programmes are building and expanding marginalised people’s capabilities and assets, strong monitoring and evaluation systems are also useful in holding NGOs and institutions accountable.

Findings suggest that although the CSP has some challenges which hinder its achievement of youths’ expectations, participants would prefer the programme remain active, albeit with some improvement and modification. It was acknowledged that the programme is a relevant, innovative, informative, integrated, strategic, and empowering intervention that was creating integration amongst NGOs, youths, and communities, as they work together on efforts to tackle the topical challenges South African youths in resource-constrained settings are battling, especially concerning HIV and unemployment. Participants indicated that besides enhancing the capacity of
youths to engage in economic strengthening issues; the CSP had empowered the youths to take responsibility for their health, to practice safe sex, to use contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy, and to confidently speak about SRH and HIV.

These findings are consistent with existing literature, which shows that youth-oriented programmes that are innovative and multi-sectoral tend to be rated favourably by the youths who describe such programmes as fun, inspiring, informative, and empowering. As the study by Ward et al. (2019) shows, adolescents and youths who were participating in an integrated intervention claimed it had given them critical insight into the social, structural, and behavioural risk factors that make them vulnerable to HIV in an engaging manner that did not make them feel like victims. Instead, the intervention motivated them to firm up their decision-making capabilities and be part of the solution. A study by Banks (2015) also confirms the importance of programmes that adopt “combination prevention” in the design. One can observe that combination prevention interventions, such as the CSP, set themselves apart from welfarist conventional social protection interventions by avoiding creating a dependency syndrome through addressing complex socio-economic challenges that youths in resource-constrained settings face.

The findings underscore the significance and innovativeness of the CSP in creating an atmosphere that encourages the youths and their communities to cooperate in eliminating circumstances that weaken their social, economic, and health well-being. Furthermore, these findings are also supportive of the perspectives of some authorities who have studied Empowerment Theory; that empowerment is a motivational process that gives energy, capacity, autonomy and authority to individuals and groups to take responsibility for changing their circumstances.

6.7 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed key themes that emerged from the study, in line with the study’s goal, objectives and research questions. The benefits and promotional functions of combining economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities were detailed. The discussion also explored how the programme pays attention to gender by empowering AGYW. The nexus or interplay involving economic strengthening and the behaviour of youths when it comes to their sexual practices was highlighted. The
discussion also covered the views of participants on whether the youths’ economic empowerment expectations had been met. Lastly, the challenges and opportunities that the CSP presents to the youths, communities, NGOs, and other potential stakeholders were discussed.

Throughout the discussions, the Empowerment Theory was applied to connect and interpret findings to existing knowledge and relevant international and local instruments that influence the practice of the CSP. Based on this discussion, the next chapter presents a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations to improve the implementation quality of the CSP.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme with a particular focus on resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa. The study employed a collective case study design located within the qualitative research approach. Semi-structured, face-to-face, individual, in-depth interviews were held with 30 youths and focus groups were held with six NGO practitioners and five DSD officials. This chapter summarises the key findings of the study, which are followed by a presentation of the study’s conclusions. The summaries and conclusions are both aligned with the study’s objectives. The potential policy and practice implications of the study are also presented. The chapter makes recommendations and presents a possible model to be used in the effective implementation of economic strengthening interventions of the CSP for youths, based on conclusions reached. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further studies.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents the summary of the main findings based on the objectives of this study.

7.2.1 The perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng

The findings are summarised in accordance with the two main themes that emerged from the first objective. These are the benefits of combined activities for youths, and the empowerment of AGYW.

7.2.1.1 Benefits of combined activities for youth

The findings revealed that the CSP offers many transformative benefits for youths when compared to standalone programmes. The participants indicated that the ability
of the programme to simultaneously empower youths with intertwined economic strengthening and HIV prevention knowledge was innovative, potentially holistic, and cost-effective in reducing vulnerability to HIV for youths. In addition, findings also showed that when HIV prevention and economic strengthening education are combined, they yield complementary effects by providing youths with the concurrent health and economic informational resources and skills that they require to implement informed decisions. It was learned that improving the youths’ knowledge of SRH is advantageous but will never be adequate on its own to completely alter the behaviours of youths. It overlooks economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, which are key to driving the practice of risky behaviours.

The findings of the study exposed that the peer group influences derived from the combined interventions of the programme had a positive effect on the youths' health behaviours and attitudes. It was found that the programme had become a safe space for the youths to grow social networks, reduce social isolation and strengthen communication and engagement skills. It was observed that the youths living with HIV found the programme particularly useful in enabling HIV status disclosure discussions.

7.2.1.2 Empowerment of girls and women

The study's findings established that the mixed-gender sessions that are used to deliver economic strengthening and HIV prevention interventions empowered female youths. Female youths indicated that they were given equal footing with their male counterparts to acquire knowledge and skills. Considering that gatekeeping is organised along patriarchal lines in communities, female youths viewed the mixed-gender sessions as playing a role in the avoidance of female social exclusion. Further, it was established that the programme helped female youths to understand the perspectives and priorities of their male peers. In this regard, the understanding of male perspectives equipped female youths with the knowledge that they need to build their confidence when confronting and challenging gender norms that contribute to their vulnerability.

It was also raised that the activities of the CSP fostered cooperation, openness, and mutual accountability by challenging female and male youths to have complementarity of purpose in confronting the restrictive and toxic nexus of patriarchy and gender
norms that put females at a disadvantage. Female youths also revealed that their participation in the programme’s mixed-gender interventions had built their self-esteem and confidence to assertively and comfortably present and speak in front of groups. Consequently, they could now share their critical reflections and opinions on the need for gender equality.

7.2.2 The way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education changed participating the youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices

The following sub-section is a summary of findings regarding the main theme that emerged from the second objective. This theme regards the interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices.

7.2.2.1 Interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices

The findings of the study found that participation in economic strengthening activities of the CSP provided the youths with the means and capabilities to make independent, assertive, and empowered sexual decisions. The participants highlighted that education in financial capabilities, employability, and entrepreneurship exposed the youths to economic avenues that they could use to build their livelihoods. It was noted that because of this education, youths understood that they did not need to undertake sexual relationships and practices for financial gain as it exposes them to HIV infection.

The study findings highlight that the economic strengthening activities done in the programme managed to build the youths’ understanding of the pathways between economic factors and sexual risk behaviours. The participants highlighted that this was particularly important for female youths, who came to understand that they had the potential to implement their own economic decisions and activities, rather than being dependent on male partners as a means of earning a living. Further, it was established that participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education made the youths resilient, as they could discern the individual and interpersonal socio-economic factors that place them at risk of adopting sexual behaviour. It was also noted that the
content of the economic strengthening modules was challenging enough to keep youths occupied for greater periods, thereby reducing loitering which could prompt them to engage in risky sexual behaviour.

The findings revealed that improvement of economic strengthening aptitude might have stirred a sense of agency and purposefulness in some youths. It was stated that this improvement prompts the youths to be more focused on achieving long-term objectives, instead of partaking in high-risk behaviour and sexual practices that put them at risk of contracting HIV. In addition, the findings showed that discovering self-agency was particularly inspiring to the female youths, who want to do better in their lives. The female youths viewed the building and strengthening of their economic capabilities as strategically important in arresting gender-based social inequalities and challenges that exacerbate their vulnerability to HIV and STIs. Furthermore, it was noted that the acquired economic capabilities could help female youths to disengage from economic disparity relationships that hinder their abilities to negotiate condom use and access sexual health services.

Surprisingly, it was found that some youths had increased their sexual relationships and activities because of the HIV prevention knowledge and skills that they had acquired from the programme. The youths indicated that because they understood the HIV prevention methods, they could freely engage in sexual activities without fear of contracting the virus. These findings could also be a clear indicator that some youths had built sufficient self-confidence to discuss their sexual practices openly and aptly.

7.2.3 The extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of the Combination Social Protection Programme are being met in resource-constrained settings

The following sub-section is a summary of findings regarding the main theme that emerged from the third objective. The objective is about the youths’ economic empowerment expectations.

7.2.3.1 The youths’ economic empowerment expectations

The findings of the study established that the acquisition of new knowledge by participating in financial capabilities, employability and entrepreneurship modules was
used as a yardstick of having achieved or attained the intended outcomes of the CSP. It was observed that the youths believed that the economic strengthening knowledge they had accumulated was empowering and encouraging to develop and nurture their economic aspirations. The participants indicated that attendance in the programme had given them the abilities and confidence to make informed economic decisions. Participants regarded the programme as broadening the livelihood choices the youths would have to make to reduce poverty and improve their overall welfare as they transitioned into adulthood.

The findings noted some youths had started to take action to implement what they had learned by saving, budgeting, and banking money. It was, however, noted that although this was useful in helping the youths to put into practice their money management capabilities, it was at a very small scale. Regarding entrepreneurship, the findings showed that a few youths had started joint, small, and low-income-generation projects, such as car washing at street corners and selling sweets at school. However, it was observed that these small enterprises were helpful for the youths to practice implementation of the fundamental entrepreneurship skills acquired during programme sessions.

The findings illustrate that the programme’s work readiness activities (which taught the youths skills to write job applications, CVs and how to conduct themselves in interviews) were regarded by participants as advantageous in enhancing the youths’ employability prospects. In addition, the findings also revealed that most youths, especially females, were more interested in employment than entrepreneurship. The findings also showed that, due to limited exposure and lack of skills required by the current labour market, most youths related more to menial, uncompetitive, and poorly remunerated jobs, generally in restaurants and the retail sector.

7.2.4 Factors that influence the success and/or failure of the Combination Social Protection Programme in resource-constrained settings

The summary of findings is structured around the two main themes that emerged from the fourth objective. These are challenges and opportunities.
7.2.4.1 Challenges

The findings of the study found that NGO practitioners and DSD officials regarded the planning and preparatory phases of the programme as challenging, as it was time and effort-consuming. Despite the challenges, the NGO practitioners and DSD officials found these phases beneficial in the cultivation of collaborations with stakeholders, such as other NGOs, DOH, clinics and schools. It was, however, noted that there was a lack of engagement and inclusion of youths in the planning and preparation phases.

Study results revealed that deep-rooted societal norms and judgemental attitudes were challenges that restricted female youths to implement self-assertiveness skills learnt from the programme. It was established that most female youths found it challenging to discuss sexual behaviour and access to contraceptives with their parents, whom they regarded as too cultural and patriarchal. It was also observed that gender discrimination and unequal treatment of female youths from male youths were rampant in households and communities. In this regard, female youths viewed society as permissive to male youths talking openly about their sexual relations and practices but the same could not be tolerated for female youths.

The participants indicated that graduation benchmarks of economic strengthening activities were unattainable. It was established that the youths did not regard themselves adequately empowered to initiate and lead independent and sustainable economic lives, even after participation in financial capabilities, employability, and entrepreneurship activities. The study findings showed that the programme was not linked to any financial institution or mechanism to help finance and resource youth initiatives regarding savings, budgeting, banking, or entrepreneurship. In addition, lack of mentorship and role models were raised as contributory factors to youths’ lack of confidence in their entrepreneurial potential.

The findings expose that the programme had not placed any youths in wage employment, despite running an employability module. It was noted that participants viewed the employability module and its activities as too generic to furnish the youths with practical skills needed to penetrate the labour market. In addition, the programme’s lack of apprenticeship opportunities was also highlighted as a challenge curtailing the programme from preparing youths for the practical world of work.
7.2.4.2 Opportunities

Study findings established that the programme had the potential to be leveraged to establish networks, linkages, and collaborations amongst stakeholders in the business, financial and health fields. The participants indicated that if the programme could establish strong networks and partnerships with business and financial entities, the youths would stand better chances to obtain some products and services that the programme lacked, such as business capital, business development mentorship, and linkages to markets.

The study results indicated that the programme could benefit from collaborating with universities and research institutes that could help in setting up robust, systematic, and evidence-informed monitoring and evaluation systems. It was established that the current systems were heavily concentrated on tracking outcomes and did not pay attention to impact. Thus, partnering with universities and research institutes could significantly strengthen the tracking and documentation of programme impact on improving quality of life, building livelihoods, and reducing new cases of HIV among youths.

It has been established that, although the programme had some challenges that hindered its effectiveness, participants wanted the programme to continue. It was observed that participants regarded the programme as relevant and innovative, with some urgency to address the complex and multi-layered socio-economic factors that make the youths vulnerable to HIV.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to explore the experiences of the youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province. The findings indicated that there were diverse benefits and promotional functions of combining economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities. The findings laid bare the links that connect economic strengthening, and the drive to help youths adopt safer practices when it comes to their sexual activity. The integrated activities of the programme were noted to be a viable vehicle for the advancement of the empowerment of AGYW. Further, the findings enabled an assessment of the
challenges and opportunities that the CSP presents to the youths, communities, NGOs, and other potential stakeholders. The conclusions that were reached from the findings are outlined concerning the six main themes that emerged in line with the goal and objectives of the study. The main themes are i) benefits of combined activities for youths; ii) empowerment of AGYW; iii) the interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices; iv) youths’ economic empowerment expectations; v) challenges; and vi) opportunities.

7.3.1 The youths’ perceptions regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng

This section focuses on the first objective of the study, namely to establish the youths’ perceptions regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng. The conclusions are drawn in accordance with the two main themes that emerged, namely benefits of combined activities for youths, and empowerment of AGYW.

7.3.1.1 Benefits of combined activities for youths

The study findings established that participants commended the CSP for having multi-layered and transformative advantages that benefit the youths in curbing drivers of HIV risky behaviours generally emanating from poverty, lack of economic opportunity and poor HIV prevention knowledge. The findings illustrated that, unlike standalone programmes, the CSP yields complementary effects that equip youths with the much-needed concurrent health and economic information and skills that they require to implement informed decisions.

Findings indicated that the programme had provided the youths with safe spaces that enabled them to grow social networks and strengthened their communication, which also facilitated HIV status disclosures. Thus, integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities enables the youths to attain better social outcomes, and for those youths that have been diagnosed with HIV, to obtain support to be enrolled in HIV care and adhere to treatment. Further, these findings cast light on why the CSP
is considered a holistic, innovative, and cost-effective programming strategy, hence its increased implementation in South Africa and other developing countries.

7.3.1.2 Empowerment of girls and women

Findings revealed that the CSP is very intentional in promoting meaningful and inclusive empowerment of female youths by setting opportunities that require both female and male youths to combine their efforts in promoting gender equality. The integrated mixed-gender sessions and activities that are utilised in the programme are essential in fostering complementarity of purpose and mutual accountability between females and males. They enable open engagement, cooperation, partnership, and collaboration that are cultivated through combined-gender activities.

The findings showed that the mixed-gender activities challenged the male youths into the introspection of how patriarchy is a gatekeeping mechanism that promotes differential access to health and socio-economic opportunities. The youths’ abilities to engage and hold each other accountable were strengthened. Integrated mixed-gender programming is therefore important in narrowing down non-binary gender discussions that perpetuate polarity between males and females. It can also be stated that combined-gender programming is important in curbing gender-blind programmes and preventing resentment associated with girl-only programmes.

7.3.2 The way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme changed participating youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices

The second objective of the study was to establish the way(s) in which participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education programme (the CSP) changed participating the youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices. The conclusions are presented per the main theme that emerged, namely the interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices.

7.3.2.1 Interplay between economic strengthening and sexual behaviour and practices

Findings showed that economic strengthening education helped the youths to understand that there are safe economic avenues that they can use to build their
livelihoods, rather than exposing themselves to HIV vulnerability through undertaking sexual relationships and practices for financial gain. The findings illustrated that if youths are provided with economic strengthening education, they become more discerning and understanding of the mutually reinforcing and significantly correlated relation between economic factors and sexual risk behaviours.

The study indicated that economic strengthening activities stirred a sense of agency and purposefulness in the youths and helped them focus on achieving their longer-term objectives. It was presented that being conscious of their agency and aspirations enticed the youths to desist from partaking in risky sexual practices. One can conclude, therefore, programme interventions that help the youths discover their agency have the potential to help them make healthy and assertive livelihood decisions, instead of engaging in risky self-indulgence.

The study’s findings suggested that female youths found economic strengthening education offered them the motivation to explore their full potential in economic growth, rather than being dependent on male partners as a means of earning a living. It was established that this realisation was very important for female youths, especially given the restrictive patriarchal and gender-based social inequalities that limit their capabilities. Thus, strengthening economic capabilities is of strategic importance in extricating female youths from economic disparity relationships characterised by a lack of power to negotiate for safe sex.

Unexpectedly, it was revealed that because of the newly acquired skills that they had gained from the programme to protect and safeguard themselves from infection by HIV, some youths reportedly increased their sexual relationships and activities. These surprising findings are an illustration that participating in the CSP improves youths’ self-confidence to discuss and disclose their sexual activities, thus overcoming cultural customs that stigmatise sex discussions as taboo.

7.3.3 The extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of the Combination Social Protection Programme are being met in resource-constrained settings

The third objective of the study was to establish the extent to which the intended outcomes (for economic strengthening) of the CSP are being met in resource-
constrained settings. The conclusions are presented following the main theme that emerged, namely youths’ economic empowerment expectations.

7.3.3.1 Youths’ economic empowerment expectations

Findings indicated that the youths acknowledged the importance of acquiring knowledge that exposed them to economic/livelihood options, as it led to them setting financial goals and choosing career paths as they transitioned into adults. Participants were aware that the programme’s economic strengthening interventions are curriculum-based, hence the youths adjudged the realisation of their economic empowerment expectations only in terms of knowledge acquisition and improvement. It could thus be said that participation in the programme met economic empowerment expectations of youths as far as improving knowledge on money management, employability and entrepreneurship were concerned.

The study illustrated that, after participating in the entrepreneurship module, a few (5) youths started small and low-income projects. It was emphasised that the income-generation projects did not influence the youths’ economic lives. The programme’s lack of financial and mentorship support was noted to have contributed to the youths’ lack of confidence in their entrepreneurial potential. It is noted that, although the CSP helped some youths gain the desire and insights to establish their entrepreneurial enterprises, it fell short of establishing opportunities and networks to facilitate them pursuing the enterprises at a large scale. Thus, the programme must partner with business entities to mentor and fund youths’ enterprise development. Findings further highlighted that most youths, especially females, were more interested in employment than entrepreneurship. The interest in employment was clustered around uncompetitive and poorly remunerated jobs in the retail and informal sectors. It can be deduced that youths in poor settings regard employment as their trusted panacea to escaping poverty. More needs to be done to expose youths in marginalised settings to high-quality, skilled, well-remunerated, and formal jobs in the labour market.
7.3.4 Factors that influence the success and/or failure of the Combination Social Protection Programme in resource-constrained settings

This section of the chapter focuses on the fourth objective of the study, namely to explore the factors that influence the success and/or failure of the CSP in resource-constrained settings. The conclusions are structured around the two main themes that emerged, namely challenges and opportunities.

7.3.4.1 Challenges

Findings established that the engagement and inclusion of youths in the planning, designing and preparation for the programme was suboptimal, as NGO practitioners and DSD officials regarded the planning phase of the programme as challenging and time-consuming. NGO practitioners and DSD officials need to involve and engage the youths fully in all the phases of the programme, from conceptualisation to implementation, to promote and sustain youth interest and programme relevance.

The study showed that female youths struggled to assert themselves and practice what they had learnt from the programme, especially regarding sexual relations because of the gender-imbalanced treatment that was rampant in households and communities. The programme must create a social milieu or environment that enables and capacitates parents, households, and communities to be fully supportive of all their youths, despite their gender.

Results showed that poverty and lack of capital made it difficult for youths to attain the graduation benchmarks of economic strengthening objectives as they could not start any viable savings, budgeting, banking, or entrepreneurial enterprises. It was revealed that the programme’s lack of job apprenticeship opportunities impeded the youths from building career capabilities and proficiencies, which would make them appealing to the job market. It was also noted that the programme had not successfully placed any youths in wage employment despite running an employability module. It is thus critical for youths’ economic strengthening programmes to work closely with business institutions, both private and public, who can assist with bankrolling youths’ entrepreneurial, internship and employment initiatives.
7.3.4.2 Opportunities

Findings indicated that the programme had the potential to network and collaborate with agencies in the business and financial spheres. These agencies could be of help with resources and skills to assist the programme in attaining its economic strengthening outcomes. Findings further suggested that the programme could be a fertile opportunity for collaboration with universities and research institutes for the generation of the CSP evidence-based data. Such collaborations could be fundamental in unravelling the impact of the programme on building livelihoods and reducing HIV for youths. Thus, practitioners in youth programmes must be trained and fully capacitated with skills and tools that will enable them to cultivate networks and collaborations with relevant agencies. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, there is more that needs to be done to unravel the impact of the programme on building livelihoods and reducing HIV amongst youths.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section provides the implications for social work. It is divided into two sections, namely implications for social work policy and implications for social work practice.

7.4.1 Implications for social work policy

The profession of social work has many faces, constantly adapting and moulding itself to suit its social context. However, the social work profession in South Africa has struggled, as elsewhere in the world, to assert itself as a central instrument in mitigating poverty and spearheading sustainable social, economic and health equality. Against this background, social work policy discourse has progressed in recent years; thus, the traditional remedial and maintenance strategies utilised in social work have become inefficient to address the dynamic needs of the modern-day youth population.

The most notable piece of legislation that regards a significant shift to the practice of integrated social work (to address unemployment, HIV and AIDS, and poor economic participation) is the White Paper for Social Welfare (2012). The White Paper is argued to have given rise to a novel social welfare system that is centred on empowerment, and participation as a means of meeting the needs of all affected South Africans (Patel et al., 2018). The Constitution (RSA, 1996) is also accredited for influencing social work
policy discourse as it asserts equality, freedom, and human dignity as essential democratic values. The NYP is another significant policy that has shaped discussions on the importance of an integrated and holistic youth development strategy in social work policy. The NYP identifies unemployment, inadequate education on HIV, and poor economic participation in mainstream economic activities as major challenges facing youths. The NDP (Vision 2030) has also been cited as another piece of legislation that has influenced the profession of social work to aspire to introduce and scale up systematic, rigorous, and innovative approaches in addressing intractable problems that are affecting and contributing to youth unemployment and disease.

Whilst some policies and legislation favour the provision of integrated social work that incorporates health, economic, social, and personal empowerment services, participants' responses did not explain how the policies were integrated into the HIV prevention and economic strengthening interventions. The programme did not fully empower youths with all the integral elements that they needed to bring about change in their lives by effectively addressing poverty and HIV risk factors. Empowerment is a polemic and indispensable construct in the social work profession. The study findings, therefore, stimulate some positive influence, as discussed below.

7.4.1.1 Consultation of the youths

Efforts to reorient economic, health, and social policies for youths should develop value-driven policymaking approaches that directly consult with the youths to improve the policies' impact in addressing vulnerabilities. The raft of policy measures outlined above has not had any major impact on addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality experienced by youths. These policy options, assumed by the government in response to the youths' unemployment pandemic, seem more knee-jerk reactions premised on political considerations, rather than well-thought-out strategies that respond to the prevailing realities of the youths in poor communities. As alluded to by the findings of the study, lack of consultation and engagement accentuates and compounds youth vulnerabilities. Social workers should thus call for the government to promulgate and implement policy options that treat youths as allies, instead of victims, and take due cognisance of their prevailing realities.
7.4.1.2 Interrelatedness of the policies

While a large array of measures and policies has been developed in South Africa to promote social, economic and health equality, they are not designed to be explicitly interrelated. The lack of consonance and harmoniousness among key government entities responsible for driving policies (such as the NYP and NDP Vision 2030) does not benefit NGOs and youths that engage in the CSP. Efforts to hold these government entities accountable for outcomes have not been successful, as collaboration is not a biding component of their key deliverables. Government should expand opportunities for integration and alignment of policies so that they pivot and build on each other. This can be done by establishing straightforward procedures that guide key government entities on how to collaborate in supporting NGOs and youths.

7.4.1.3 Case for combined social welfare approach

As a developing country with prevalent youth unemployment, South Africa has a demand to develop novel approaches and policies by going beyond the traditional foci of social welfare policymaking. The current dominant traditional social welfarist and remedial approaches are ineffective and obsolete in meeting the contemporary needs of youths and their communities due to their maintenance-consumption focus. Thus, there is a need to introduce a combined welfare approach that innovatively integrates strategies such as financial management, business skills, and linkages to employment and health services to facilitate youths’ economic and social self-sufficiency.

7.4.2 Implications for Social Work Practice

The role of social work regarding poverty and unemployment is to empower beneficiaries to become independent and self-sufficient. The social work community needs to be proactive in equipping youths with skills that they can use to access employment opportunities and build their livelihoods sustainably. To confront the aspect of unemployment and poverty, notwithstanding the complexities involved, the entire social work profession must be instilled with broadened and enlightened knowledge and skills to provide the CSP as a minimum primary package for youths. To move beyond traditional welfarist and remedial approaches, social workers must be prepared to increasingly implement innovative and integrated social welfare
programmes for youths in marginalised settings. Beyond this minimum requirement (and to address programmatic challenges of the attainment of economic strengthening outcomes), social workers need specialised education that will arm them with the prowess to cultivate and coordinate multisectoral stakeholder groups that must work together for the youths to attain envisaged economic strengthening outcomes. Training given to social workers must be re-engineered to accommodate for the inclusion of specialised training on the CSP.

When social workers are adequately trained, it becomes easier for them to equip NGOs with the skills to effectively implement all elements of the CSP, particularly economic strengthening interventions. Intensive capacity building and training seminars, taught by skilled social workers, would be most welcomed by the NGOs. There is a need to place a greater focus on guides and standard operating procedures for NGOs and all stakeholders on how to implement the CSP. It would be particularly shrewd to circulate reports amongst NGOs, DSD, donors, and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the methods or strategies that can be used to implement the programme.

Finally, a research agenda purely concerned with the practice of the CSP should be elevated and prioritised. The agenda will endeavour to explore, not only the theoretical aspects, but also the policy and practical context which have precipitated poor practice, and which need to be changed if positive outcomes are to be achieved. Findings from such research might trigger a re-think on the effectiveness of the strategies that social workers are utilising to implement the programme.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations, which form the basis of the proposed framework to follow, are advanced:

- The DSD, in collaboration with the NYDA and NGOs, should introduce a centralised coordinating and monitoring mechanism to address the disjointedness and lack of accountability among public and private agencies that have a mandate to fund and support efforts to address poverty, inequality, joblessness, and poor health amongst youths;
• NGOs should partner with public and private business agencies to implement a robust entrepreneurship mentorship and coaching model within the programme to develop and support the interest in entrepreneurship amongst youths;
• There is a need for the South African National Department of Basic Education to implement an entrepreneurship curriculum in schools from the primary level onwards, to expose youths early to entrepreneurial knowledge and skills that they might need to start their businesses. This move will decrease the perception that paid employment is the only avenue available to youths to escape poverty;
• There is a need for NGOs to engage with families, households, and communities to address the gendered attitudes and patriarchal views that they hold which create barriers for youths to address harmful and restrictive gender norms and practices;
• DSD should drive the agenda to expand implementation of the CSP to many other poverty-stricken communities, to build capacity and empower more youths;
• Donors, especially USAID and its technical support partners, should thoroughly train NGO practitioners on the programme as some of them lack the education and skills to understand the synergies between economic strengthening and HIV prevention education; and
• The DSD and NGOs should develop and implement smart and robust tools that can measure and evaluate the appropriateness and adequacy of the CSP in building livelihoods and reducing HIV among the youths.

**7.6 ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING MODEL FOR YOUTHS**

From the conclusions reached by the study, the economic strengthening interventions of the CSP were cited as having structural and enduring challenges that undermine their success. It was observed that the interventions need to do more to create an enabling environment by purposefully engaging youths, establishing collaborative relations with communities, building networks with relevant entrepreneurial stakeholders, instituting mechanisms to institutionalise stakeholders’ accountability, and setting up a toolkit to monitor and evaluate interventions progress. Given this context, a model that has the potential to catalytically influence the successful
implementation of economic strengthening interventions is proposed. The proposed model is depicted in figure 6.
Figure 6: Economic strengthening model for youths

Source: Researcher’s construction
Figure 6 describes the model. Below is a detailed outline of the figure and the linked-in processes that ensure best practice in enhancing the implementation of economic strengthening interventions to improve experiences and outcomes for youths.

7.6.1 Generating youths buy-in

The activity of generating youths and community buy-in should be the preamble of the entire economic strengthening process. The NGOs should consider establishing youths advisory councils, comprising of selected youths to be ambassadors that will represent the other youths by providing counsel to the NGOs when it comes to designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the interventions, as this ensures the interventions are ‘by youths, with youths, for youths’. This step will be an acknowledgement that youths have the creativity, the potential, and the capacity to make change happen for themselves and their communities. Dialogue facilitated through the youths advisory councils will facilitate routine collection of youths feedback on intervention use and will also point to areas that need a course correction. This step will ensure collective thinking as the NGOs will form a stronger connection with the youths and gain greater insight into their needs. Providing youths with the opportunity to participate in the decision will breed social ownership and accountability and will empower and inspire them to take on the greater initiative. Where collective thinking has been established, a collaborative relationship is nurtured that allows youths and the NGOs to work together to drive social innovation and change in the programme.

7.6.2 Integrating the community

In this step, it is important to engage youths along with gatekeepers, such as their families, communities, and community leaders. These gatekeepers have strong influence and control over the value system that surrounds the youths. Strategic, conscientious, and well-informed negotiations with explicit and implicit gatekeepers are therefore required to build a collaborative and harmonious relationship between the programme and the gatekeepers. Engagement and integration of gatekeepers from the planning phase of the programme fosters healthy relationships and creates a supportive and enabling environment that can guarantee sustained access and cooperation of the gatekeepers throughout the programme’s life span. Gatekeepers
can benefit the programme by influencing, driving, and shaping community attitudes and priorities. As an example, the support of gatekeepers is crucial in creating enabling and supportive community conditions, particularly for female youths, as gatekeepers can be change agents that help challenge the deep-seated gender and patriarchal barriers that do not favour female youths participation in economic strengthening interventions.

7.6.3 Building an entrepreneurial network

The importance of creating a robust network constituted by the public as well as private business establishments to help with the growth of the programme’s entrepreneurship activities is important. In what will be a ‘winning coalition’, it is anticipated that the network will perform a fundamental function in providing leadership, innovation, and technical guidance in cultivating youths’ entrepreneurial creativity. In this step, the NGOs and the DSD play an active role to bring together a group of entities with diverse resources, expertise and commitment needed to support youths in their entrepreneurship development endeavours. The business network should comprise partners that can unveil capital (seed funding) for youths to pursue their capabilities of developing competent enterprises. Further, the entrepreneurial network can create an enabling environment that positions the intervention to achieve better outcomes by creating linkages that youths can utilise to access formal apprenticeship and employment opportunities.

7.6.4 Institutionalising accountability

Once the entrepreneurial stakeholder network has been established, it is vital to develop and implement an accountability plan that will track and hold every stakeholder accountable. This step is crucial for the revamping of processes to permit the undertaking of changes that might be essential if efficiency in service delivery is to be realised. The accountability plan will be structured per agreed-upon deliverables and will spell out timeframes for the delivery of milestones, thereby improving transparency and alignment of expectations. The accountability plan will be institutionalised and embedded into the programme, thereby underpinning the plan as a common and accepted mechanism of monitoring the quality and responsiveness of services by all stakeholders. Thus, the accountability plan will help to avoid rhetoric as
stakeholders are answerable for the commitments or pledges that they make. The commitments could be related either to facilitating youth access to business capital, business development mentorship, or linkages to markets, apprenticeships, and employment. An environment that favours transparency will be developed in the programme, as stakeholders will hold each other liable for their actions.

7.6.5 Monitoring and evaluation

To cope with the programme’s limitations in implementing results-based monitoring as well as an evaluation system, it is paramount for the NGOs and all stakeholders to converge and develop methodological tools that can collect, aggregate, and analyse programme data. This data would determine and measure whether actual intended results are being produced. The NGOs and the stakeholders will have to build the technical capacity of their implementation staff, to enable them to successfully operate the system.

The bedrock to building and sustaining comprehensive results-based monitoring and evaluation systems lies in the NGOs and the stakeholders being fully committed to pulling together - offering their time, effort, and resources to champion the systems. Alongside tracking outputs, a monitoring and evaluation system that is results-based will be a powerful management tool for the programme when it comes to assessing the long-term value and impact of economic strengthening interventions. A robust monitoring and evaluation system will lay the foundation for an adaptive environment that allows for learning and utilisation of data to improve economic strengthening programming.

7.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions are made for future research:

• Since this study was a qualitative study that was conducted with only six NGOs in CoJ MM in Gauteng Province, the suggestion is that studies with a similar focus be run nationally to obtain a broader view of the experiences of youths participating in the CSP and HIV prevention programmes in resource-constrained settings;
• A research study that explores challenges encountered by the NGOs in their quest to collaborate with organisations established to support youths’ entrepreneurial and economic development is needed. Although South Africa has many such organisations, little has been done to evaluate their capacities and the challenges which render them ineffective in supporting youths’ economic empowerment programmes that are being implemented by NGOs in poor communities;
• Full-factorial randomised controlled trials should be conducted to obtain a comprehensive assessment of the extent of the CSP in reducing HIV and STI incidences amongst youths. The current study only focused on exploring the views of youths regarding how participating in economic strengthening and HIV prevention education changes youths risk behaviour and sexual practices;
• Research in the future could also wholly focus on assessing the impact of CSP approaches on reducing poverty levels and improving the quality of life amongst youths in marginalised communities;
• A study should be conducted solely with female youths to identify and comprehend the health as well as social benefits of the programme in enabling AGYW’s agency and promoting gender-equitable outcomes;
• A study should be held to investigate the cost-effectiveness and benefits of integrating economic strengthening and HIV prevention programme interventions in comparison to offering the interventions as singular or individual approaches; and
• A quantitative time and motion study would benefit the NGOs that are implementing the CSP to establish the amount of time it takes for various categories of staff to conduct specific tasks related to the programme.

7.8 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a summary of the study’s major findings and concluded on how each of the findings aligned with the study’s objectives. Thereafter, implications for social work policy and practice were considered. Recommendations that are anticipated to enhance the implementation of the CSP in resource-constrained communities were put forward. Following these recommendations, a model was
proposed to support social workers, NGOs, DSD, and all stakeholders in implementing economic strengthening interventions for youths. This chapter brought the study to a close by offering suggestions for further studies.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTRODUCTION

My name is Enock Zibengwa, and I am a PhD student in the Department of Social Work/Social Development at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study focused on obtaining the holistic view on the experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the practice of Combination Social Protection by asking questions on the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths; the way(s) that participating in Combination Social Protection has changed participating youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices; the extent to which the intended outcomes of Combination Social Protection are being met and the factors that influence the success and/or failure of Combination Social Protection.

You have been selected to be part of the research sample and you are kindly asked to assist by answering the questions in this interview guide. Please be assured that all responses remain confidential, all the participants will remain anonymous, and their responses will be used for academic purposes only. It will take about 30 minutes to answer all the questions. Please answer these questions as best you can. Thank you for your cooperation.
APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

INDIVIDUAL INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM¹

(AGES 18 YEARS AND ABOVE)

Please note:

This form will be completed by the researchers as well as by the interviewee before the commencement of the research. Copies of the signed form will be filed and kept on record.

Title of Study: Experiences of youths participating in combination social protection programme and HIV prevention in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa: A collective case study design.

Dear participant,

My name is Enock Zibengwa, and I am a PhD student in the Department of Social Work/Social Development at the University of Fort Hare. I am here with my research assistant, Babbot Muchanyerei. I am conducting a study focused on obtaining the holistic view on the experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the practice of Combination Social Protection by asking questions on the perceptions of the youths regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths; the way(s) that participating in Combination Social Protection has changed participating youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices; the extent to which the intended outcomes of Combination Social Protection are being met and the factors that influence the success and/or failure of Combination Social Protection. Thirty youths aged between fifteen and twenty-four years from six NGO that are implementing Combination Social Protection in Gauteng Province have been deliberately selected to be interviewed. You are part of the youths that have been selected to
be part of the research sample and you are kindly asked to assist by answering the questions in this interview guide. It will take about 30 minutes to answer all the questions. Please answer these questions as best you can.

Some questions may be of a personal and/or sensitive nature. I will be asking some questions that you may not have thought about before. We know that you cannot be certain about the answers to these questions, but we ask that you try to think about these questions. When it comes to answering questions there are no right and wrong answers.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary, and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours. However, we would really appreciate it if you do share your thoughts with us. If you choose not to take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop me at any time and tell me that you do not want to go on with the interview. If you do this there will also be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced in ANY way.

The information will remain confidential. This means that your name and address will not be linked in any way to the answers you give. We study and report on the answers given by all the people we interview and not on an individual basis. The research data will be anonymous – with all personal respondent information removed and will be archived at the University.

At the present time, we do not see any risks in your participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be helpful in finding out if Combination Social Protection has the potential to help with HIV prevention among youths in marginalised communities.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns

This research has been approved by the Inter-Faculties Research Ethics Committee (IFREC) as per delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please call the IFREC Administrator, Ms V Ngwevu on +27 (0) 40 602 2297 or email on vngwevu@ufh.ac.za.

Reporting and Complaints

If you have questions at any time about this study, or if you have concerns/questions you may contact the researcher/project leader whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise
which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher/project leader, please contact the IFREC Chairperson, Prof. Pumla Gqola on +27 (0) 40 602 2297, email pgqola@ufh.ac.za or UREC chairperson, Prof. Renuka Vithal also on +27 (0) 40 602 2297, email RVithal@ufh.ac.za.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact the Researcher/Project Leader:

**Name:** Enock Zibengwa

**Faculty/Department:** Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities

**Address:** University of Fort Hare

1 King William’s Town Road

PB X1314, Alice 5700

**Phone:** +27 (0) 78 994 5455

**Email:** enockzibengwa@gmail.com

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**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I (name of participant) …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

have been informed about the study by Enock Zibengwa

I understand the purpose, procedures, and risk-benefit ratio of the study.

I have been given opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any procedurals that I would usually be entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as result of study-related procedures.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this informed consent.

I understand that if I have any questions or complaints about my rights as a study participant, or if I may have concerns about any aspect of the study or the researcher/s then I may contact the Chairperson of the Inter-Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Prof. Pumla Gqola or
Chairperson of University Research Ethics Committee, Prof Renuka Vithal (details available from the Researcher or by contacting the University of Fort Hare or Website [www.ufh.ac.za](http://www.ufh.ac.za))

**Participant signature:** ……………………………………………………………………………………..

**Consenting for Audio Recording** – when necessary

YES / OR

**Participant signature:** ……………………………………………………………………………………..

**Data curation** – I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

**Participant signature:** ……………………………………………………………………………………..

**Date:** ………………………………

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University of Fort Hare

*Together in Excellence*
APPENDIX 3: ASSENT FORM

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
(YOUTHS AGED 15-17 YEARS)

Please note:
This form will be completed by the researchers as well as by the interviewee before the commencement of the research. Copies of the signed form will be filed and kept on record.

Title of Research: Experiences of youths participating in combination social protection programme and HIV prevention in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa: A collective case study design.

Dear participant,

My name is Enock Zibengwa and I am studying at the University of Fort Hare towards a Doctoral degree in Social Work. I am here with my research assistant, Babbot Muchanyerei. My research study is about experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province.

There is some information about this study you should know. It will take about 30 minutes to answer all the questions. Please answer these questions as best you can. Do not worry about whether your questions are right or wrong.

If a question makes you feel uncomfortable or you don’t understand what is asked, please ask that it gets explained differently or you can choose not to answer the question if you do not want to.

There will be no direct benefit to you for answering these questions. If you do not want to be part of this research study, we understand and there will be no consequences.
When we are finished with this study, we will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you participated in the study.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that is okay too. Your parents know about the study too.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, __________________________ [write your full name], agree to be in this research study.

________________________________________
(Sign your name here)

________________________________________
(Date)

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

I hereby agree to the audio recording of my participation in the study.

I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

________________________________________
Signature of participant

________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX 4: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

PARENTS’ INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM¹

Please note:

This form will be completed by the researchers as well as by the interviewee before the commencement of the research. Copies of the signed form will be filed and kept on record.

Title of Research: Experiences of youths participating in combination social protection programme and HIV prevention in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa: A collective case study design.

Who we are

Hello, I am Enock Zibengwa, a student for Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities / Social Development at the University of Fort Hare. I am here with my research assistant, Babbot Muchanyerei.

Your child’s participation

We are asking your permission for your child to be part of an interview as well as to participate in a focus group with other children of the same age. The questions will look at the perceptions of the youth regarding the benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education for youths; the way(s) that participating in Combination Social Protection has changed participating youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices; the extent to which the intended outcomes of Combination Social Protection are being met and the factors that influence the success and/or failure of Combination Social Protection.

A focus group is when a group of people are asked about their perceptions and knowledge on a particular issue or product. While every effort will be made by the study team to protect the
confidentiality of his/her/their information, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will respect confidentiality, even though every member will be asked to do so. This focus group discussion will take approximately one hour.

Please understand that your child's participation is voluntary, and they are not being forced to take part in this study. You can decline consent for the child to participate. If he/she/other chooses not to take part, they will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If he/she/other agrees to participate, they may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that they don’t want to go continue. If he/she/other does this, there will be no penalties and he/she/other will not be prejudiced in any way.

Confidentiality

All identifying information about your child will be kept in an electronic computer file and will have a password which will be given to only a few researchers on the study, and will not be available to others and will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from his/her/other participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the ethics committee at the University of Fort Hare. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

We are asking you to give us permission to tape-record the interview so that we can accurately record what is said.

Your child’s answers will be stored electronically in a secure environment and used for research or academic purposes now or later in ways that will not reveal who you are. All future users of the stored data are required to apply for further Research Ethics Committee review and approval for secondary use of the stored data.

We will not record his/her/other’s name anywhere and no one will be able to connect your child to the answers he/she/they give. Their answers will be linked to a fictitious code number, or a pseudonym (another name) and we will refer to him/her/they in this way in the data, any publication, report, or other research output.

Risks/discomforts

At the present time, we do not see any risk of harm from your child’s participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Benefits
There are no immediate benefits to your child’s participation in this study.

**Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns**

This research has been approved by the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and Inter-Faculties Research Ethics Committee (IFREC) as per delegated authority by UREC. If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact the UREC Administrator, Ms V Ngwevu on +27 (0) 40 602 2297 or email on vngwevu@ufh.ac.za.

If you have concerns or questions about the research, you may contact the study supervisor:

Professor Pius T. Tanga  
Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities; University of Fort Hare. 1 King William’s Town Road, PB X1314, Alice 5700. 
+27 (0) 40 602 2195 (Office telephone); +27 (0) 67 388 7599 (Mobile number) 
ptanga@ufh.ac.za (Email).

**CONSENT**

I hereby agree to allow my child to participate in research on experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa. I understand that my child is participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I or my child can stop participating at any point should I not want him/her to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect us negatively. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit myself or my child personally in the immediate or short term. I understand that my child’s participation will remain confidential.

**Signature of participant’s parent** …….. **Date:** …………………..  

**CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING**

I hereby agree to the audio-recording of my child’s participation in the study.

**Signature of participant parents** …….. **Date:** …………………..  

I understand that the information that my child provides will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

**Signature of participant parents** …….. **Date:** …………………..
APPENDIX 5: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM
(18 YEARS AND ABOVE)

Please note:
This form will be completed by the researchers as well as by the interviewee before the commencement of the research. Copies of the signed form will be filed and kept on record.

Title of Research: Experiences of youths participating in combination social protection programme and HIV prevention in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa: A collective case study design

Who we are
Hello, I am Enock Zibengwa, a student for Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities / Social Development at the University of Fort Hare. I am here with my research assistant, Babbot Muchanyerei.

What we are doing
We are conducting a study focused on obtaining the views on experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Your participation
We are asking you to participate in a focus group discussion. A focus group is when a group of people are asked about their perceptions and knowledge on a particular issue or product. While every effort will be made by the study team to protect the confidentiality of your information, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will respect
confidentiality, even though every member will be asked to do so. For this reason, you are advised not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group. This focus group discussion will take approximately one hour.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that you do not want to go continue. If you do this, there will be no penalties and you will not be prejudiced in anyway.

What we are asking you to do?

We are asking you to share your views on experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Confidentiality

All the information collected from you and all recordings will be kept in an electronic computer file with a password that will be given to only a few researchers on the study. The password will not be available to others and will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the ethics committee at the University of Fort Hare. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that may identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

We are asking you, where required, to give us permission to tape-record the focus group so that we can accurately record what is said.

Your answers will be stored electronically in a secure environment and used for research or academic purposes now or later in ways that will not reveal who you are. All future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Committee review and approval.

We will not record your name anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give should you request non-disclosure of your identity. Your answers will be linked to a fictitious code number, or a pseudonym (another name) and we will refer to you in this way in the data, any publication, report, or other research output.

Confidentiality for focus group cannot be guaranteed
Risks/discomforts

At the present time, we do not see any risk of harm from your participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Benefits

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to us in that we hope will improve youth interventions/programmes directed at addressing HIV/AIDS in your community.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns

This research has been approved by the Inter-Faculties Research Ethics Committee (IFREC) as per delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please call the IFREC Administrator, Ms V Ngwevu on +27 (0) 40 602 2297 or email on vngwevu@ufh.ac.za.

Reporting and Complaints

If you have questions at any time about this study, or if you have concerns/questions you may contact the researcher/project leader whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher/project leader, please contact the IFREC Chairperson, Prof. Pumla Gqola on +27 (0) 40 602 2297, email pggola@ufh.ac.za or UREC chairperson, Prof. Renuka Vithal also on +27 (0) 40 602 2297, email RVithal@ufh.ac.za.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact the Researcher/Project Leader:

Name: Enock Zibengwa

Faculty/Department: Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities

Address: University of Fort Hare

1 King William’s Town Road

PB X1314, Alice 5700

Phone: +27 (0) 78 994 5455

Email: enockzibengwa@gmail.com
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, (name of participant)...................................................................................................have been informed about the study by Enock Zibengwa.

I understand the purpose, procedures, and risk-benefit ratio of the study.

I have been given opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any procedural that I would usually be entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as result of study-related procedures.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this informed consent.

I understand that if I have any questions or complaints about my rights as a study participant, or if I may have concerns about any aspect of the study or the researcher/s then I may contact the Inter-Faculties Ethics Committee (IFREC) or the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

Participant signature: ...................................................................................................

Consenting for Audio

YES / OR

Participant signature: ...................................................................................................

Data curation – I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

Participant signature: ..............................................................................................

Date: ........................................................................................................................
APPENDIX 6: REQUEST TO NGOS FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

DATE .........
NGO address ................................

Request for Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Mr/Ms ............

My name is Enock Zibengwa, a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work student at the University of Fort Hare. The research I wish to conduct for my Doctoral thesis involves Experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct the study in your NGO. I would like you to assist by making arrangement to allow me to interview youths participating in the programme. I am also requesting that you make yourself available to participate in a Focus Group Discussion, together with other NGO managers, at a date and venue to be specified.

I have provided you with a copy of my proposal which includes copies of the data collection tools and consent and assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on +27 (0) 78 994 5455 (cell phone) and enockzibengwa@gmail.com (email address). Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Enock Zibengwa
University of Fort Hare
APPENDIX 7: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTHS

Goal of this study

To explore Experiences of youths participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme in resource-constrained settings of Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Section A: Biographical details of the participants

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age distribution
   - 15-17 yrs
   - 18-20 yrs
   - 21-24 yrs

3. Race
   - Black
   - Coloured
   - White
   - Indian

4. Highest Level of Education
   - Primary
   - Secondary
   - Matric
   - Tertiary

5. Employment status
   - Currently employed
   - Not employed

6. Period of participating in Combination Social Protection programme
Section B: Experiences on the process and benefits of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education (Combination Social Protection)

7. What type of activities are you involved with in the Combination Social Protection programme?

Probe for:

Description of the activities.

8. What do you think are the goals of the Combination Social Protection programme?

Probe for:
- Addressing youth unemployment.
- Addressing HIV prevention.
- Addressing community and national youth issues.
- Addressing youth economic empowerment.
- Addressing harmful gender norms and gender-based violence.

9. What do you think are the benefits and synergistic effects (If any) of combining economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education?

10. Explain whether there are the combination and interaction between economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education has any greater effect than if the two (economic strengthening activities and HIV prevention education) were offered separately.

10.1 Please explain how.

Probe for:
- Links between the Combined ES and HIV Interventions.
- Links and synergistic effects between economic strengthening and HIV prevention knowledge.

11. What are the changes (if any) in gender dynamics that you have experienced because of participating in Combination Social Protection programme?

Probe for:
- Roles, behaviours, activities.
- Views on equal decision-making and division of responsibilities between boys and girls during Combination Social Protection activities.
- Change of Views on gender-based violence.
- Change of views and attitudes toward gender roles.
12. If there are changes, please describe how the programme is playing a role in the changes.

Probe for:
- Views on equal decision-making and division of responsibilities between boys and girls during Combination Social Protection activities.
- Change of Views on gender-based violence.
- Change of views and attitudes toward gender roles.

**Section C: Way(s) in which combination social protection has brought change in youths’ risk behaviour and sexual practices (HIV protective and risk reduction questions)**

13. Describe whether your participation in the economic strengthening and HIV prevention education (Combination Social Protection) has brought any changes to your behaviour and sexual practices.

Probe for the actual changes:
- HIV prevention education (knowledge and skills).
- Condom use.
- Negotiating for safe sex.
- Testing for HIV.
- Abstaining from sexual activity.
- Disclosing of HIV status.
- Family Planning.
- Sexual Reproductive Health services.
- Transactional sex.
- Gender-based violence.

13.1 Please describe how (way/s) the Combination Social Protection has brought about changes (if any) in your behaviour and sexual practices.

Probe for:
- Differences in youth’s behaviour and sexual practices before participating in Combination Social Protection and now that they are participating in Combination Social Protection.

**Section D: Extent to which intended outcomes of combination social protection have being met (economic strengthening)**

14. Describe whether your current achievement with Combination Social Protection is what you expected it would be.

14.1 In what way has it become/not become as you expected?

15. Explain if your participation in Combination Social Protection has increased your ability to earn and manage money and make economic decisions.
15.1 Please explain how the Combination Social Protection has done so.

Probe for:
- Differences (and changes) in youth’s ability to earn and manage money and make economic decisions before participating in Combination Social Protection and now that they are participating in Combination Social Protection.

16. What are the economic benefits (capabilities, assets, skills, knowledge, functioning) (if any) that you have derived from participating in the programme.

Probe for:
- Employability capacity (potential to get a job or your capacity to work).
- Income-generation capacity (ways or projects that can give you money on a regular basis).
- Entrepreneurial capacity (business mind-set or venture or involvement in a business).
- Savings (opening savings account and/or participating in savings group).
- Financial knowledge.
- Access to financial, business, and social support networks (formal and informal).

17. In your opinion explain if Combination Social Protection helped you to start anything new in your life.

18. In your understanding would you say Combination Social Protection is bringing brought about any development in your community?

18.1 If yes, describe the kind of development?

18.2 If no, why not?

Section E: Factors (if any) influencing the success and/or failure of combination social protection

19. What is the best part about participating in Combination Social Protection?

20. What is the toughest part about participating in Combination Social Protection?

21. Could you share with me some factors that enable (or constrain) your potential to achieve your goals in Combination Social Protection?

Probe for:
- sources of support at the NGO and home.
- challenges being experienced

22. What measures does the NGOs, Community and government need to implement to ensure the success and sustainability of Combination Social Protection?

Probe for:
- What do needs to be done differently to improve the effectiveness of Combination Social Protection
- Strategies for dealing with challenges
Section F: Recommendations

23. I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else that would be important for the research which I have not asked you and is important to enhance or help you realize your aspirations through Combination Social Protection?

23.1 If yes, please describe?
APPENDIX 8: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR NGO PRACTITIONERS AND DSD OFFICIALS (KEY INFORMANTS)

- Greetings and introduction.
- Goal of the study
- Researcher explains about confidentiality and anonymity.
- Use for academic purpose only.
- Ask for permission to switch on audio recorder.

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<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>DSD</th>
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<th>Venue of Focus Group</th>
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Questions

1. As a group, can you briefly tell me the activities that constitute the Combination Social Protection programme?
2. In your view and experience, describe the benefits (if any) and synergistic effects of combining economic strengthening and HIV prevention activities. (probe for links between Combined Economic Strengthening and HIV Interventions).

3. Describe your perspective of the activities offered in Combination Social Protection
   3.1 In what ways (if any) are the services helpful to youths?
   3.2 In what ways (if any) are the services not helpful?

4. Behaviour change is important for HIV prevention. Would you say youths’ participation in Combination Social Protection has brought any changes to youths’ behaviour and sexual practices?
   4.1 If it has, how exactly has Combination Social Protection brought about changes in behaviour and sexual practices in youths?

5. There are arguments that addressing gender issues should be cross cutting in all youth HIV prevention programmes. In your experience would you say Combination Social Protection has brought about any changes in how youths perceive gender dynamics? (probe for roles, behaviours, activities, attitudes).
   5.1 If it has, how exactly has the Combination Social Protection brought about the change in gender dynamics amongst youths?

6. In your view and experience, explain whether the intended outcomes and goals of Combination Social Protection programme are being met
   6.1 In what ways (if any) are the intended outcomes and goals being met?
   6.2 In what ways (if any) are the intended outcomes and goals not being met?

7. Statistics South Africa notes that unemployment amongst youths is on the increase yearly. Would you say Combination Social Protection is helping in any way in addressing employment outcomes for youths?
   7.1 If yes, please can you tell me in detail how activities in Combination Social Protection being used by youths to address unemployment?
8. Describe any economic benefits (if any) that you have witnessed youths deriving from participating in Combination Social Protection *(probe for capabilities, assets, skills, knowledge, functioning)*?

9. In your view, explain whether Combination Social Protection empowered youths to start anything new in their lives  
9.1 Please explain what is it?

10. What kind of development has Combination Social Protection brought about in your community?

11. Do you think the South African government has created an enabling environment for NGOs to implement Combination Social Protection? Please explain.

12. What kind of challenges affect successful implementation of Combination Social Protection in this community?

13. Please share how these challenges (or factors) constrain the potential of Combination Social Protection.

14. What do you think must be done differently by NGOs and government to improve the effectiveness of Combination Social Protection? *(probe for strategies, approaches and mechanisms for dealing with challenges).*

15. What are the things about Combination Social Protection that you would like to see changed?

16. Is there anything else you would like to say about what could be done to enhance or help youths realize their aspirations through Combination Social Protection?
Conclusion

We have now reached the end of the discussion. I would like to thank you all very much for your participation in this discussion, your experiences and opinions are very valuable to assist in improving outcomes for youths who are participating in Combination Social Protection and HIV prevention programme.
APPENDIX 9: EDITORIAL LETTER

Marielle Tappan
Wapadrand, Pretoria
Tel 072 474 1158
Email mteditorialinfo@gmail.com

Date of Edit: 25 July 2022

Edit: Enock Zibengwa

To whom it may concern,

I, Marielle Tappan, trading under the name MT Editorial, hereby confirm that I am a language editor.

I have extensive experience in the field of language and publishing and received my Bachelor of Information Science in Publishing from the University of Pretoria. I am also a registered member of the Southern African Freelancer’s Association.

I hereby declare that the editing done for any client is done with the utmost diligence and the full appreciation of the English language and all of its intricacies, as was done for edited sections of this document.

If there are any other queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards,

Marielle Tappan
Owner MT Editorial
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Marielle Tappan