**Make Child Mothers Count! FAQs**

*1. Who are child mothers?*

Child mothers are girls who become mothers before the age of 18. This is in accordance with Article One of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.[[1]](#footnote-1) Below this age the girl is physically and psychologically underprepared to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*2. Why are FORWARD championing child mothers?*

FORWARD’s vision is to see a world where women and girls are able to claim their rights and live in dignity, free from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Child motherhood undermines a girl’s ability to exercise her right to education, health and personal autonomy. Child mothers tend to drop out of school early, and are often prevented from returning to formal education due to the social stigma they face. Sadly, without education, girls have limited opportunities to become economically independent, which in turn leaves them more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. The inability to return to school not only hinders girls’ economic potential, but it can also affect their self-esteem and social status within their own homes and in the wider community.

By supporting child mothers to return to school and complete their education, these girls will have a greater chance of living with dignity, being able to access, protect and defend their rights and the rights of their children.

*3. What are the benefits for child mothers of returning to school?*

Educating girls has been described as the “world’s best investment” because it increases economic opportunity for girls. It increases a nation’s productivity and economic growth and leads to a cycle of healthier, better educated children.[[3]](#footnote-3) For every girl who finishes school not only her life, but the lives of her children will be transformed because of the increased opportunities available to her.

*4. How many girls are affected?*

It’s hard to say exactly how many child mothers exist in the world today. They have been neglected for so long that there is a huge lack of data. This is partly because most data concerning birth rates and ages tends to be grouped between the ages of ’15 years and under’ and ’15-19 years old’. However, we do know that globally there are 44.1 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.[[4]](#footnote-4) Moreover, in Africa this number increases drastically by 127% to 100.3 adolescent births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 annually.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*5. Why child mothers in Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Kenya?*

We know that child mothers are being left behind. FORWARD has operational programmes in these three countries and, with our partners, we have identified that girls need support to re-enter education after becoming child mothers. Child motherhood in Tanzania, Kenya and Sierra Leone has a higher prevalence when compared with global and regional averages. According to the United Nations Development Programme, in 2010 there were 130.4 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 - 19 years old in Tanzania. That same year there were 119.0 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 - 19 years old in Sierra Leone and 100.2 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 - 19 years old in Kenya. As previously mentioned, this data doesn’t take in to account girls below the age of 15 who have become child mothers. Tanzania’s adolescent birth rate is 30% higher than the average for Africa, Sierra Leone’s is 19% higher. Kenya’s is level with the Africa wide figure but still significantly higher than the global average.

*6. What are the causes of child motherhood?*

Child motherhood can arise for a variety of reasons. Child marriage and sexual violence are key factors, but poverty, social and cultural norms also have a large role to play. National-level policies and politics may restrict girls’ access to sexual and reproductive health services, while community or family members may prevent girls from accessing comprehensive sexual health and relationships education. Underlying social norms place pressures and expectations on girls from a young age. These norms and practices often place a girl’s value at less than a boys and may limit girls’ aspirations to be nothing more than a mother who does not work outside the home. Child motherhood goes hand in hand with powerlessness, lack of choice, poverty, and pressures from partners, peers, families and communities.

*7. How many child mothers are you working with?*

FORWARD and our partners in Tanzania ([Children’s Dignity Forum](http://www.cdftz.org/), [Umati](https://www.umati.or.tz/),) Sierra Leone ([Girl 2 Girl](http://www.girl2girlngo.org/index.php/about-us/) Empowerment Movement, [Advocacy Movement Network](http://amnet-online.org/)) and in Kenya ([Young Women’s Leadership Initiative](https://www.facebook.com/YoungWomensLeadershipInstitute/)) are working with approximately 150 child mothers.

*8. How will the materials in the school kits help the girls return to school?*

Even when school is free, or the fees are paid for, there are many hidden costs involved in education that need to be met. These include (but are not limited to) the cost of school uniforms, stationary and exercise books. FORWARD wants to ease the burden on girls by providing some of these necessary items to enable their successful return to education. The items we and our partners have identified are school uniforms and shoes, satchels, exercise books and pens and pencils. Although these items may sound basic and inexpensive, to child mothers who are trying to turn their lives around they are essential, and this extra expense alone is often unaffordable. We want the girls we work with to feel supported and empowered as they pursue their dreams. Supplying these items will take these girls one step closer to fulfilling their potential.

*9. How much do the items cost?*

A full school kit will be made up of a school bag, uniform (including shoes), an exercise book and stationary. The average kit cost is £118.00. Our target of raising £5,000 will allow us to support over 40 of the child mothers we are working with who are ready to return to school.

*10. How will you get the kits to the girls?*

Money raised through the Make Child Mothers Count campaign will be directly distributed to FORWARD’s in-country partners.

The donations will be distributed according to need. Our partners will buy the items locally and select the girls who will be supported to go to school.

11. How will you select which girls get support?

Our partner organisations will select participants from the child mothers they are already working with. They will specifically look to work with girls who are able and ready to return to school. The more money we raise in the campaign, the more child mothers we will be able to support.

*12. What about school fees?*

This campaign is focused on supporting girls that are ready to go back to school. This means they have made arrangements to either attend a free, or a funded school with a plan to cover school fees. By supporting girls with the hidden costs of such school arrangements we will remove obstacles which could then prevent them from taking up these places in education.

*13. Is the campaign sustainable?*

We know that tackling and changing discriminatory social norms takes a long time, which is why we are running this campaign alongside our more extensive country-based projects ([to find out more about FORWARD’s work click here](http://forwarduk.org.uk/what-we-do/africa-programmes/)). This fundraising campaign is the start of a larger project FORWARD will be pioneering over the next two years regarding the rights of child mothers. It is our hope that through this campaign, support for and acknowledgement of child mothers’ will become a key fixture on the international development agenda, until both individual states and the international community prioritise the social and educational rights of child mothers.

*14. What about the girls that don’t get to go back to school now?*

FORWARD recognises that we cannot support every child mother to return to school, but our various in-country projects do provide extensive work on safeguarding girl’s rights, including gender-based violence prevention, income generating activities, leadership skills training and sexual and reproductive health education. It is our hope that those child mothers we are not able to reach directly through the campaign will be supported through our other work.

Alongside direct implementation, FORWARD also works with our partners to amplify the voices and needs of African women and girls on a national and international level, through our work with governments, global partnerships, the media and other international NGO’s.

*15. I know FORWARD through your work on child marriage, how do child marriage and child motherhood interlink?*

Despite near-universal commitments to ending child marriage, one in three girls in developing countries (excluding China) will probably be married before they are 18 and one in nine girls will be married before their 15th birthday.[[6]](#footnote-6) In Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Kenya social expectations often mean that once a girl is married she should quickly become pregnant to fulfil her new role as a wife. These expectations are borne out of gendered attitudes to women’s familial and domestic duties. Where child marriage is concerned, it is customary for a girl to be removed from education (which is an expense to the family) so that she can focus on raising children and running the household.

*16. I know FORWARD through your work on FGM, how do FGM and child motherhood interlink?*

In countries and communities where FGM is practiced it is often performed as a precursor to marriage and an initiation into adulthood. Girls are normally cut before the age of 18 without giving consent, and, upon being cut are deemed ready to be married and therefore mothers.

*17. I know FORWARD through your work on fistula, how do fistula and child motherhood interlink?*

Prolonged and obstructed labour, which causes fistula, is particularly prevalent among child mothers whose bodies have not finished developing. Child mothers face a higher risk of obstructed labour than young women in their twenties. Without adequate emergency obstetric care, this can lead to uterine rupture and a high risk of death for both mother and infant. For those who survive, prolonged labour can cause obstetric fistula, which is a hole between the vagina and the bladder or the rectum, causing urine or faeces to leak.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*18. When will you give me an update of how my donation is being used?*

We’ll announce how much money the campaign has raised on the International Day of the African Child, June 16th, the final day of the campaign. We will then send you an update in November 2017 on how the money is being spent and how it has helped child mothers return to school. Please be aware that this campaign is not a child sponsorship programme, you will not receive personalised communications from any individual girl FORWARD is working with.

1. http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Inter-African Committee (IAC) on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children. 2003. Newsletter, December 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sperling, G. B. and Winthrop, R. 2016. What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence for the World’s Best Investment. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, DVD Edition. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Fertility/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision - Special Aggregates, DVD Edition. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/SpecialAggregates/UNrelated/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6 UNFPA (2013), Marrying too young: End child marriage, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/6/09-020609/en/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)