

# SUPPORTING TEENAGE MOTHERS IN SIERRA LEONE



## Context

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 184 out of 188 in the [UN Human Development Index](#). The progress the country had made following the end of the civil war was undermined by the Ebola

outbreak in 2014 and more recently the mudslides and flash floods in 2017. Sixty percent of Sierra Leoneans are living below the [poverty](#) line and there is 70% unemployment amongst young people.

## The problem

In Sierra Leone, the prevalence of teenage pregnancy is gradually becoming a crisis. A June 2017 report found that approximately 13% of girls become pregnant before the age of 15, and 28% begin childbearing between 15-19 years old. This has robbed many young girls of education and other development opportunities.

Burma is a small community on the outskirts of Kenema in eastern Sierra Leone with a population of 6,000. Here, 60% of girls became pregnant before the age of 15 and have never had the opportunity to learn a skill or trade. The young mothers, who are still children themselves, are often rejected by their partners and their parents who want to avoid family shame. As a result, they are unable to provide for their babies.

Many feel they have no other option than to turn to sex work to make a living. These [girls](#) are being sexually exploited and abused by adults, whose role should be to protect them. They face high risks of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and violence. Their children are vulnerable while their mothers are working.

### Project objectives

The objective of our project is to provide teenage mothers from the Burma community with skills so they are able to establish their own business or seek employment, meaning they are financially independent and better protected from these risks.

- Twenty mothers will receive skills training and business start-up kits.
- Ten children will receive childcare.
- Over 120 family members will benefit from the increase and stability in family income.



### Our local partner

Our local partner is Future Focus Foundation, a volunteer-led organisation working in rural communities across eastern Sierra Leone. The Foundation promotes social justice and equal opportunities through awareness raising and livelihood programmes. All of its programmes are developed with the women and communities it works with and the majority of its volunteers are female. Future Focus Foundation runs a successful training centre which, since 2013, has trained over 200 people in marketable trades, all of whom are now in employment or running their own businesses. They have been a ChildHope partner since 2013.

### Our donors

Our donor partners for this project are the Paul Hodges Trust, the AB David Charity, the Dorfred Charitable Trust and the William A Cadbury Charitable Trust. There are opportunities for us to develop our work with this community further so if you are interested in finding out more, please [get in touch](#).



## Our activities

The young women are receiving training in either tailoring, embroidery, hairdressing or cloth-weaving, depending on their interests. The course will include work experience placements. The majority of the women are illiterate or have extremely low levels of education, so they will also receive literacy and numeracy support.

Business development training will ensure that after the course, the women can become self-reliant and provide a stable income for their family. Life skills training will support them in areas such as hygiene and nutrition so they can provide a healthy environment for their children. The women will also be encouraged to join savings groups to save for their children's education and plan for the future. The group savings scheme will also offer financial literacy training and in some cases small loans for business development and in emergencies.

This project will also support a childcare facility within the training centre for 10 children whose mothers do not have help with childcare. These children will receive meals, sanitary kits and toys so they can develop their basic skills.

At the end of the training women will receive ongoing support and mentoring for up to a year or until their businesses are fully established. Group savings schemes are also monitored to ensure the women are planning their safety net. To assess how well the mother's improved financial security is benefitting children, social workers monitor children's school attendance and their health and physical wellbeing.

## in numbers

**Our current project with Future Focus Foundation began in summer 2018 so is in the early stages of implementation. Our previous project in this community, which also focused on creating financial security, achieved the following impacts and outcomes:**

- **165** rural female-headed households benefitted from the project.
- **30** young mothers attended vocational skills courses.
- Nine group savings schemes were established, reaching **135** female-headed households.
- The health and wellbeing of **660** children was improved as a result of their mothers' improved skills.
- Each of the groups provided financial literacy training for the women and received a grant of **£145** to set up a programme of emergency loans and small business development funding.
- **150** children now attend school regularly because their school fees, uniforms and school materials are paid for.

WATCH ME





— In their words —

## Marjorie's story

"Today I have recognition in my family and my community."

Marjorie was still in primary school when she realised she was pregnant. "I was driven away by my parents for what they referred to as 'shame in the family,'" says Marjorie. "I stayed with friends until I delivered and started selling food for the upkeep of me and my daughter."

A chief in Marjorie's community recommended her for the Future Focus Foundation programme, an intervention that Marjorie describes as a 'golden opportunity to change my life.' She joined 30 young mothers aged 15 to 25 who, like her, had missed out on school and were struggling to earn enough money to care for their children.

The women were offered seven months' vocational skills training in tailoring, embroidery or hairdressing. At the start of the training, the Foundation discovered that 60% of the women were illiterate and the remaining 40% had received very little formal education. So the Foundation added a literacy and numeracy component to the training.

Marjorie and her fellow students all completed the training and gained confidence in themselves and their ability to support themselves and their children. "Today, I have recognition in my family and my community," says Marjorie. "I can now earn income from my trade and my life is improved."

**You can read more stories from ChildHope [here](#).**