WHAT
Improve the lives of 6.5 million married and unmarried adolescent girls.

WHERE
Select countries in Africa and Asia

WHY
Every year, more than 14 million adolescent girls are forced into marriage, making them vulnerable to early childbirth, limiting their potential and perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

WHEN
2017 – 2021

HOW
Seeking $44 million to scale up CARE’s Taking Charge model, enhance reproductive health information and services, and expand opportunities for adolescent girls.
They face a situation that puts their lives at risk with every unplanned pregnancy, reduces their earning potential and has long-term poverty implications for their families and communities. The cost of adolescent pregnancy is estimated to reduce girls’ lifetime earnings by up to 30 percent.

Unfortunately, most adolescents in poor countries — especially married girls — have little or no access to reproductive health information and services, and do not have the power to make decisions. CARE’s adolescent sexual and reproductive health work aims to reach this population, building their skills, changing their environment and delivering the services they need to change their futures.

At CARE, we recognize that married adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable. These girls tend to fall into a void between existing programs that deal with adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and maternal health services for married adult women.

**CARE’s Taking Charge model is designed specifically to bridge that divide.**

Rigorously tested in remote villages in Ethiopia, *Taking Charge* successfully mitigated the harmful effects of child marriage by helping teenage wives gain access to health information and services, including family planning; enlist support from their partners and communities; and develop the skills they need to pursue their aspirations.
Taking Charge has two main components:

**#1 Peer-Based Solidarity Groups**

bring together married adolescents for 12 months of training on sexual and reproductive health, communication and negotiation skills. After completing the curriculum, group members continue to meet on their own and provide one another important social and emotional support. They also get involved in other growth and empowerment opportunities, like CARE’s Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and business skills trainings, that enable them to save, invest and earn more income.

**#2 Community Engagement**

mobilizes influential village elders, religious leaders, mothers-in-law, husbands and community health workers in a parallel training course, encouraging them to re-examine the tradition of early marriage and gaining their support for family planning and more equitable sharing of household responsibilities and decision-making.

Applying these two simple components can lead to significant changes in traditional behaviors and success that’s worth investing in for scale. In Ethiopia — after just one year — 100 percent of participating married adolescent girls had access to reproductive health information and services; 78 percent were using a modern family planning method to delay or space their births; 70 percent were voluntarily tested for HIV; and approximately 80 percent joined a longer-term VSLA to increase their incomes. These young mothers also gained confidence and reported greater communication with their partners about family decisions. Incidence of sexual violence decreased, and families and community members joined together to directly prevent 180 child marriages.

CARE is one of few organizations to offer a proven program to support married adolescent girls. Our results are both immediate — improving access to health services and reducing maternal and infant deaths — and longer-term, helping them become empowered and earn more money. In addition to the 3 million married adolescent girls we will reach with this initiative, by building community support for preventing child marriage and increasing access to reproductive health information and services, an additional 3.5 million unmarried adolescent girls will benefit from this catalytic investment. Your support is needed right now to reach our $44 million goal to adapt and expand this successful model in additional countries in Africa and Asia. This investment will unlock an additional $87 million to assist governments in training health workers and teachers, and to work with partners to implement and promote additional evidence-based program and policy initiatives. Together, we will help millions of girls to make informed decisions about starting families, and to aspire to healthier and more productive lives.
NO LONGER OVERLOOKED

Before getting involved with CARE’s program, Fikir, a married adolescent mother with one child, says she knew very little about her reproductive health and was rarely allowed to leave her home in rural Ethiopia, even to go to the nearby market. Her husband insisted her place was in the home, cooking, cleaning and having more children. He made all the decisions. Through CARE, Fikir learned about reproductive health and began to facilitate peer group sessions. Her husband’s attitude changed, too, after participating in separate training sessions and having those messages reinforced by Fikir at home. As a result, they now share household chores equally and decided together to have two children instead of four, spread out over five years.

Continuing to redefine herself, Fikir has become a role model by serving as a volunteer gender facilitator and helping others in her community. By making a targeted investment right now, you can help provide meaningful benefits to 3 million married adolescent girls like Fikir, as well as another 3.5 million unmarried adolescent girls, and ultimately, help them attain reproductive health rights and break the grip of poverty.

OUR ROAD AHEAD

“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

- Nelson Mandela

We all have the ability to make a difference in the world. At CARE, we believe part of our role is to connect and support those who share our vision of a world without poverty. If you believe that human potential is greater than poverty, join us. Invest with us. Believe with us. We can end suffering, poverty and injustice in the world — For Good.