

Engel Entertainment Presents

# A WALK TO BEAUTIFUL

## TAKE ACTION GUIDE



As seen in *A Walk to Beautiful*, obstetric fistula is treatable. Moreover, it is completely preventable. Just as the condition has all but disappeared in industrialized countries, it can be eliminated worldwide. Organizations working in over 40 countries in Africa, Asia and the Arab region are dedicated to achieving this goal. They are making an impact in every stage of the journey a woman makes toward obstetric fistula, treatment and rehabilitation. The key to eliminating obstetric fistula includes intervention at each of these points. While these organizations are already changing the lives of many women, there are so many more who still need support. This guide will walk you through their journey and introduce you to organizations which need our help in the fight against obstetric fistula.

# Poverty

**The journey toward obstetric fistula begins with poverty** - It's no coincidence that the United States has no recent reported cases of obstetric fistula. While the United States has a great number of people living in relative poverty, access to medical care is still significantly greater. Poverty robs people of choices. It contributes to fistula by closing off options at critical points in a woman's life. Despite these challenges, women prove every day that the cycle of poverty can be broken.



*“Fistula, it's a hidden epidemic, it's a silent epidemic. Nobody talks about it. Because it's a problem of the poor woman, it's a problem of women. But it's one hundred percent preventable.”*

**- Dr. Ambaye**

## The Facts

Approximately 19% of the world's population lives on less than \$1 a day.

73% of the population in the world's least developed countries lives in rural areas.

Figures from 2008 UNICEF State of the World's Children

## What You Can Do

Eradicating poverty, as called for by the Millennium Development Goals, is an overarching aim of many international organizations. [UNFPA](#) and its partners in the Campaign to End Fistula focus on tackling poverty primarily through interventions to improve women's reproductive health and rights. Reproductive health interventions also have far-reaching and inter-generational effects in terms of reducing poverty, and have been shown to be cost-effective entry points to ending the cycle of poverty.

The [One Campaign](#) is an effort to rally individuals – ONE by ONE – to fight extreme poverty and treatable, preventable diseases. ONE's 2.5 million members work to get the attention of elected leaders at key moments to advance the fight against poverty and disease. ONE focuses on the basics – feed, heal, hydrate and educate. In this effort, focusing on women in the developing world is key to advancing the fight against poverty. Expanding women's access to basics such as simple healthcare and primary education creates society-wide benefits that strengthen families, communities and nations over time. By signing up to be a part of the One Campaign, you will make sure your voice is heard.

# Loss of Childhood

**Poverty shortens childhood** - Children, and especially girls, in resource-poor settings are often removed from school and subjected to strenuous work to support their families. Due to the need for extra labor or support for ill parents or an inability to pay school fees, girls do not have the same access to education and opportunities as boys. In addition, girls and women are given less access to family resources such as food and water. They are often married and become pregnant at very young ages. In short, many girls are robbed of their rights to education, healthcare, protection and recreation. Constant strenuous labor and lack of nutrition combine to cause poor health and lack of physical development in many girls and women in these settings. However, girls continually demonstrate that when they are given the chance, they will surpass expectations in school and beyond.



*“Most peasant women in the developing world have to do all the hard work, they have to do the cooking, the grinding of the corn, the collecting of the water from the well, carrying sticks from the forest. So all her energy has gone into work instead of into growth.*

*She hasn't had enough nourishment. ”*

**- Dr. Catherine Hamlin**

## The Facts

Of the 137 million illiterate youth in the world, 63% are female.

Only 62% of girls in rural Ethiopia have ever attended school.

A developing country study showed that doubling the proportion of women with a secondary education would reduce fertility rates from 5.3 to 3.9 children per woman.

Figures from UNFPA and the Girls' Education Project

## What You Can Do

**Engender Health** helps young people delay the age of marriage and early childbearing by increasing their access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Their programs partner with young girls, their communities and their families to address cultural pressures that deny girls the opportunity for healthcare, education and safe, paid work and instead push them to marry and bear children. Your contributions will help support these efforts.

**The MAIA Foundation** supports programs that encourage girls to remain in school and empower them with critical lifeskills. For example, in Uganda they are funding The Railways Children Primary School's Life Skills and Health Education Program for boys and girls which includes lessons on gender relations, effective communication and how to prevent violence and abuse. Your support will fund these critical lifeskills lessons that help girls remain safe.

# Early Marriage

## Early marriage further reduces girls' choices, safety and opportunities –

Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are frequently married before age 18, and often to older men. Parents decide to marry their daughters for reasons ranging from seeing the girl as a financial obligation, protecting the girl from sexual abuse, preventing sex outside of marriage, maximizing child births and teaching obedience. Early marriages are often a symptom of gender inequality and can cause serious consequences in girls' lives. Tracking the number of these early marriages is difficult because it is usually illegal and so many are hidden and unregistered – demonstrating the isolation these girls face. The good news is that families often choose to postpone these dangerous unions upon learning of the benefits of later marriages.



*“I didn't want to get married. I ran away many times. I refused to go back... but my father kept beating me. I was about ten or eleven. Then I was married off to another man without my consent. I kept running away until I finally stayed with the fourth one... because I got pregnant.” -Wubete*

## The Facts

In countries like Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, more than 60% of women marry before age 18.

In Zimbabwe, 48% of women who had attended primary school were married by age 18, compared to 87% of those who had not attended school.

Figures from UNICEF

## What You Can Do

[Global Health Council](#) encourages policy makers to support efforts to end child marriage and promote greater empowerment for women and girls. A donation to their advocacy efforts will help ensure our country's sustained commitment.

[The MAIA Foundation](#) is helping to ensure that young women have the skills and resources they need to become economically self-sufficient and less reliant on others. They are funding innovative projects in Uganda that help women access lifeskills education, income generation training and vocational skills-building. Your financial contributions will help them support more such programs.

[UNFPA](#) is improving social and economic opportunities for adolescent girls. For example, in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and India, strategies will include a community assessment in selected regions of the countries, the mobilization of community and opinion leaders toward ending child marriage, and recommendations for actions that can be adapted by countries with a high prevalence of child marriage. Your support will allow more girls in these regions with the options and opportunities they deserve.

# Early and Frequent Childbearing

**Safe and effective family planning is often inaccessible** – Many girls and women would like, but do not have, access to information about reproductive health and contraceptive methods. As a result, the fundamental right to choose how many children to have and when is often denied to females in developing countries. When girls are married at a young age, they often begin bearing children long before their bodies are physically ready for pregnancy and labor. However, women's knowledge of family planning is increasing and fertility rates are falling around the world.



## The Facts

More than 200 million women globally wish they had access to safe and effective family planning methods, but do not.

The fertility rate in the world's least developed countries in 1970 was 6.7 per woman. Today, that rate has fallen to 4.7 children per woman.

*"If she gets pregnant at the age of fourteen, definitely the baby would be too big for her to pass through during delivery."*

- Dr. Ambaye

Figures from UNFPA and UNICEF

## What You Can Do

**Global Health Council** encourages policy makers to work toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and support the right of all women to safe pregnancy and child birth, and the right of all individuals and couples to plan their families. Your donation will enable them to reach policy makers with this critical message.

In 2007, the **UNFPA** helped 140 countries expand access to quality family planning services. As a result, more women can control the timing of their children - allowing them to be physically, emotionally and financially prepared. Your support will help more women access these life-changing services.

**EngenderHealth** works worldwide to improve the quality of family planning and reproductive health services. They help people make informed choices about contraception and educate communities about where and when to access reproductive health services. Your contribution will help link quality family planning services with maternal health services, to maximize every opportunity to prevent fistula, and to enable fistula survivors to decide whether or when to have their next child.

# Unsafe Childbirth

**Skilled birth attendants are unavailable in many rural areas** – While in the developed world most women have never considered giving birth without a doctor, skilled attendant or midwife, less than 30% of women in rural areas of developing countries give birth with a skilled attendant. Most of these women have no access to pre-natal care to determine if their pregnancy is healthy and are expected to endure labor and birth alone or with an untrained community member. When complications arise, there is often no access to emergency obstetric care. Three of the major challenges facing safe motherhood efforts are the severe shortage of trained skilled human resources (obstetricians, midwives, and anesthesiologists), poor infrastructure, and inadequate transportation systems. Fortunately, the fight to end fistula is making a difference and more and more women have access to safer child births every year.



*“The labor lasted for a week. The baby died in my womb.  
After the doctor took it out, I felt something leaking”.*

**- Ayehu**

## The Facts

Teenage girls are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as in their twenties.

The chances of a woman dying in childbirth are 1 in 2,800 in high-income countries. The chances in Africa are 1 in 16.

Figures from UNFPA State of the World's Population and UNFPA Campaign to End

## What You Can Do

In 2007, [The Fistula Foundation](#) supported the development of the new Hamlin Midwifery College in Ethiopia to train midwives for rural areas. These midwives will increase access to prenatal care and skilled delivery, as well as provide referrals when emergency obstetric care is required. By 2010, the Hospital expects to train 25 midwives per year. Your contribution will help support the training of these midwives.

[The MAIA Foundation](#) is supporting safe motherhood projects in Uganda, such as the Uganda Private Midwives Association. These innovative projects are expanding community education campaigns around the importance of skilled birth attendants and helping to equip midwives with information about obstetric fistula. Your donation will allow more of these projects to expand to reach more communities.

[The White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood](#) is helping to amplify the voices of women by targeting powerful global institutions and governments and holding them accountable for the devastation of maternal mortality and injury. Your financial support will help to bring maternal health advocates from the developed world to testify at these strategic international development events.

# Obstetric Fistula

**Obstetric fistula is devastating** – A childbirth injury such as obstetric fistula can destroy a woman's social, emotional, financial and physical livelihood. The most traumatic part for many women is the rejection from her own husband, family and community. Interconnected root causes contributing to obstetric fistula include poverty, early childbearing, gender discrimination and poor health services. Fistula occurs when emergency obstetric care is not available to women who develop complications during childbirth. This is why women living in remote rural areas with little access to medical care are at risk. Childbearing before the pelvis is fully developed, as well as malnutrition, small stature and general poor health, are contributing physiological factors to obstructed labor. During prolonged labor, pelvis tissues are compressed between the baby's head and the mother's pelvic bone. The loss of blood flow causes these tissue to die, creating a hole between the mother's vagina and bladder, or between the vagina and rectum or both. The physical result is a constant leaking of urine, feces or both. However, fistula can be eliminated with significant and sustained intervention at every stage of a woman's journey through life.



## The Facts

At least two million women are living with fistula in developing countries, with 50,000 to 100,000 new cases each year. These numbers are conservative estimates, due to the isolation surrounding the condition.

Almost 70% of fistula victims end up with no living children, further isolating them from the traditions of their community.

Figures from the UNFPA Campaign to End Fistula and the Worldwide Fistula Fund

*“My life is limited to living here, waiting for a food to be thrown in my direction. I have no married life, I don't have a job, I don't mix with people.” - Ayehu*

## What You Can Do

In 2003, [UNFPA](#) and partners launched a global Campaign to End Fistula. It is now active in more than 45 countries in Africa, Asia and the Arab States, preventing and treating fistula and rehabilitating and empowering women after treatment. Since 2003, the Campaign has secured more than \$25 million to support countries' efforts and more than 7,800 women have received fistula treatment.

The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, supported by [The Fistula Foundation](#), is building five new regional fistula hospitals, co-located with existing government hospitals. The Fistula Hospital is also working with local government officials to strengthen the availability of emergency obstetric care. Your contribution can help them to continue improving the accessibility of obstetric fistula services in Ethiopia.

Since 2005, [EngenderHealth](#) has facilitated repair surgery for 7,954 women and trained 208 surgeons in fistula repair in 12 countries. In addition, they train providers to counsel fistula survivors and provide invaluable emotional and social support. Your contribution can help sustain training and supervision for surgeons, nurses, and social workers in Africa and Asia who perform repair surgery and counseling.

# The Walk to Beautiful

**The journey is long and lonely** – Many women with obstetric fistula do not understand their condition and that they are not alone. However, the word is spreading that obstetric fistula is treatable. Like the women in A Walk to Beautiful, the news can be a fresh beginning for their lives. Upon hearing there is a cure, the challenge for so many women then lies in the journey to a fistula treatment clinic.

When women learn of a clinic, they often travel alone for days by foot, donkey or, if they have the resources, public transportation in hopes of finding a cure.



*"I am very surprised. I never expected there to be a lot of people like this. Everybody is sick. I thought it was only me.."* - **Ayehu**

## The Facts

Rural areas are typically extremely geographically isolated from urban centers and health clinics.

One woman in Mali walked 340 kilometres to reach a clinic for fistula treatment in Mali.

Facts from UNFPA Campaign to End Fistula

## What You Can Do

The **UNFPA** is helping to ensure that women are able to make the trip to receive treatment. While this journey is relatively very inexpensive, often under \$10, it is typically impossible for women to afford. Your donation will provide transportation costs for these women.

**The Fistula Foundation** sponsors radio and television campaigns designed by the Fistula Hospital to encourage women with fistula to seek treatment, de-stigmatizing the injury and helping alleviate the shame associated with it. In the campaign, men are also encouraged to help women seek treatment. Your contribution will help expand this community education campaign.

**The White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood** organizes community outreach activities in 11 countries affected by obstetric fistula. For example, the Alliance works with village leaders and community groups to promote safe motherhood messages, arrange emergency transportation during pregnancy and labor and integrate family planning and birth preparedness into other community services. Your support will help The White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood ensure that more women can access emergency obstetric care.

# Treatment and Rehabilitation

**Obstetric fistula is treatable** – Fistula repair is a surgical procedure to mend the hole between the bladder and the vagina and/or the rectum and the vagina. Due to the delicate nature of the condition, most women also need weeks of post-operative care and rehabilitation. However, as seen in *A Walk to Beautiful*, many women are full of hope and can now begin planning for their new lives without obstetric fistula. The women are able to meet other women with the same condition and realize that they are no longer alone. Patients also participate in intensive emotional healing while their bodies are mending. For women who do not wish, or are unable, to return to their communities, some clinics also provide skills training so women can become financially independent. When they leave the clinic, these women are able to reclaim their lives.



*“Being at a fistula hospital is a part of psychotherapy. They discuss their problem with other women. They start to understand there are other women with the same kind of problem. - Dr. Ambaye*

## The Facts

The average cost of a fistula treatment is \$300, beyond the reach of most women with the condition.

Surgery can mend the injury, and success rates are as high as 90% for uncomplicated cases. (For complicated cases, the success rate is closer to 60%.)

Facts from UNFPA

## What You Can Do

**The Worldwide Fistula Fund** is planning a new regional fistula center in rural Niger. The Center will offer free “whole-person” care to fistula victims and equip women with reintegration support. Your contribution could help provide the Center with a hospital bed or food and clothing for patients.

**The Fistula Foundation** directly supports the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and its four regional hospitals in diagnosing and treating obstetric fistula with free holistic physical and emotional care. The hospital has treated over 32,000 women since 1974 and never turns away a woman in need of care. Your support will help cover the cost of surgery, post-operation care, a class in health and basic literacy, a new dress or bus fare home.

The government of Niger has announced a strategic partnership with the **International Organization for Women and Development** (IOWD) to build a center of excellence for women's health to prioritize meeting maternal health goals, including treatment of obstetric fistula. IOWD will contribute expertise in training Nigerien surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses on treatment of fistula, as well as education outreach and support for fistula patients and the community aimed at preventing fistula. Your contribution will help facilitate the sustainability of these initiatives for the women of Niger.

# Get Involved

## **Too many women around the world still make this journey alone.**

It's time for action. The fight against obstetric fistula is not for women only. The stories of these women are relevant to people all over the world and from every walk of life. While making a financial contribution to the organizations dedicated to ending fistula is the most direct method of taking action, there are also other important ways to get involved. The women you met in *A Walk to Beautiful*, and their peers around the world, deserve our commitment.

## *Spread the Word*

One of the most debilitating components of obstetric fistula is the silence surrounding the condition. Few people around the world even know these women are suffering. One simple way to make a difference is to commit to breaking that silence by telling family members, colleagues and friends about the tragedy of obstetric fistula and the hope you have seen in these women. Also, if you have a blog or a website, you can lend your voice to the fight by linking to the websites of organizations dedicated to obstetric fistula.



## *Organize a Screening*

*A Walk to Beautiful* is a powerful tool to spread the word about obstetric fistula. People around the world have organized screenings in their homes, churches, schools, universities, community centers, local theaters and offices. To organize a screening, purchase a copy of *A Walk to Beautiful* at [www.walktobeautiful.com](http://www.walktobeautiful.com), find a venue and organize an audience. Often, organizers collect donations at the screening to contribute to an organization featured in the film or in this guide. You can also download and print this viewers guide for each person to take home. For large fundraisers or academic screening events, contact Engel Entertainment at [allison@engellentertainment.com](mailto:allison@engellentertainment.com) for more information.

## *Host a Small Gathering*

Getting together for a dinner party, wine tasting, potluck, BBQ or brunch is a great way to reconnect with friends and family and spread the word about obstetric fistula. At the event, you can discuss *A Walk to Beautiful*, the journey toward obstetric fistula and the organizations working on each stage of the journey. Your guests may even decide to pool their resources to make a gift to one of those organizations. The Fistula Foundation has a program called Circle of Friends that helps assist groups and individuals hold fundraising or informational events to support the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and other Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in Ethiopia. If you are not sure what kind of event you want to hold, you can go to the Foundation's website to get ideas and information about how to host your own event - [www.fistulafoundation.org/help/circleoffriends/](http://www.fistulafoundation.org/help/circleoffriends/).



# Get Involved

## Employer Sponsorship

Many corporations have budgets specifically for tax-deductible charitable purposes. To distribute funds, they often look to their employees to nominate a cause or an organization. Or, they may have an employee donation matching program. If you choose to make a financial contribution, many employees will match that donation to increase the impact of your gift.



## Social Gifting

One way to give a unique gift is to make a donation toward obstetric fistula in honor of someone else. Not only will your gift be more meaningful to the recipient, it will help to change the life of a woman in need. If you have an upcoming wedding or shower, you may consider letting your guests know that, instead of a gift registry, you would like them to make a donation in your name to an organization supporting the elimination of obstetric fistula.

## Write a Letter

A significant component in the fight against obstetric fistula is securing public funding and policies in the support of women's rights and health around the world. Without a public outcry, this will continue to be under-prioritized. Putting pressure on elected officials is our responsibility. To find government contact information, visit <http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>.



## Be Creative

There are as many ways to support women and maternal health as there are women who need the support. People all over the world have created their own unique ways to contribute. Their ideas are as diverse as a garage sale fundraiser, dedicating a summer's worth of babysitting funds or charging a small admission fee to a birthday party. What will your commitment be?

**Engel Entertainment**, [www.engelentertainment.com](http://www.engelentertainment.com), is a dynamic, innovative television and film production company that produced the award winning film "A Walk to Beautiful". The DVD of the film featuring the full-length documentary (with special features including commentary by the filmmakers, a 10 minute short film "Fistula Worldwide: The Hidden Epidemic" and additional scenes and interviews is available for purchase at [www.walktobeautiful.com](http://www.walktobeautiful.com)

**To support organizations dedicated to eliminating obstetric fistula, visit their websites:**

**EngenderHealth - [www.engenderhealth.org](http://www.engenderhealth.org)**

EngenderHealth is an international reproductive health organization working to improve the health care in the world's poorest communities. EngenderHealth empowers people to make informed choices about contraception, trains health providers to make motherhood safer, promotes gender equity, enhances the quality of HIV/AIDS services, and advocates for positive policy change.

**The Fistula Foundation - [www.fistulafoundation.org](http://www.fistulafoundation.org)**

The Fistula Foundation is dedicated to the treatment and prevention of obstetric fistula through support of the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in Ethiopia. The Fistula Foundation's first priority is to achieve financial sustainability for the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals as they expand their treatment and prevention programs for the growing number of fistula patients.

**Global Health Council - [www.globalhealth.org](http://www.globalhealth.org)**

The Global Health Council is the world's largest membership alliance of health professionals, concerned citizens and organizations dedicated to saving lives and improving health throughout the world. For over 35 years, the Global Health Council has worked to ensure that all who strive for improvement and equity in global health have the information and resources they need to succeed.

**The International Org. for Women and Development - [www.nigerfistula.org](http://www.nigerfistula.org)**

The IOWD is committed to a comprehensive model for the delivery of quality of women's health care within the existing health system in Niger by providing free treatment and care for patients suffering from obstetric fistula, training Nigerien surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses in the prevention, treatment, post-operative care and social integration of fistula patients, as well as actively engaging in community outreach aimed at building awareness about obstetric fistula.

**MAIA Foundation - [www.themaiafoundation.org](http://www.themaiafoundation.org)**

MAIA supports and advocates for improved health and health literacy for women in Sub-Saharan Africa. MAIA specifically seeks to improve maternal health, reduce maternal mortality and improve access to reproductive and family planning services for women. MAIA invests in solutions and programs that strengthen the capacity of women to navigate their health and that of their families.

**One - [www.one.org](http://www.one.org)**

The ONE Campaign is an effort to rally individuals – ONE by ONE – to fight extreme poverty and treatable, preventable diseases. ONE's 2.5 million members work to get the attention of elected leaders at key moments to advance the fight against poverty and disease. ONE focuses on the basics – feed, heal, hydrate and educate. In this effort, focusing on women in the developing world is key to advancing the fight against poverty. Expanding women's access to basics such as simple healthcare and primary education creates society-wide benefits that strengthen families, communities and nations over time.

**UNFPA - Campaign to End Fistula - [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org), [www.endfistula.org](http://www.endfistula.org)**

In 2003, UNFPA and partners launched a global Campaign to End Fistula with the goal of making obstetric fistula as rare in developing countries as it is in the industrialized world by 2015. The Campaign is now working in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia and the Arab region and involves a range of partners on three key areas: Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation.

**White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood - [www.whiteribbonalliance.org](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org)**

The WRA is at the forefront of holding governments and donors accountable for maternal mortality. With members in 108 countries and National Alliances established in 12, WRA has proved to be an effective advocate for systemic changes that give girls and women access to lifesaving care.

**Worldwide Fistula Fund - [www.wfmic.org](http://www.wfmic.org)**

The Worldwide Fistula Fund is a public charity organized for the purpose of supporting international medical education and research on the problem of obstetrical trauma in the developing world. Their approach to fistula intervention includes patient care, social reintegration and rehabilitation, prevention, clinical research and surgeon training.



The MAIA Foundation



ONE THE CAMPAIGN TO MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

