



ARK Special Fall Report: **"Don't Punish Our Girls,"** Campaign

Dear ARK Supporter,



Recently, to add to the pain, President John Magufuli of Tanzania **banned pregnant girls and young mothers** from attending school or even returning to school. **Sadly, each year more than 37,000 East African girls drop out of school due to pregnancy and then face an uncertain future.** For more than 20 years, ARK, as a child-focused organization, has invested both human and financial resources in ensuring that orphans and vulnerable African children—especially girls—receive the education they deserve in order to escape generational poverty. President Magufuli is threatening to fire any administrator who disobeys his order.

Our options are limited: Either we stop what we have been doing for the past 20 years, or we challenge the President's order and risk our staff on the ground being arrested. **With your support we shall continue.**

ARK has started an outreach campaign, **"Don't Punish Our Girls,"** to raise awareness about the stigma that many African governments create for young girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy. It is nothing short of a tragedy to humiliate these girls, some of whom were raped or forced by circumstances beyond their control.

Please partner with ARK! **It is a no brainer that education is a proven tool that has the capacity to lift many African families out of extreme generational poverty. For each girl who stays in school, her chances improve to make better decisions and delay marriage.**

On average, about 27 percent of young Tanzanian girls from the ages of 13 to 18 become pregnant. Furthermore, the rate of underage marriage remains very high in most parts of Africa, where girls as young as 13 may be forced into marriage. But, rather than protecting innocent girls, **President Magufuli, known for his "iron fist" leadership, is turning a blind eye on our girls.**

This November, after students complete their national secondary school examinations, the government will start its debate about how to deal with underage marriages.

ARK has a window of opportunity during this time before the debate starts to raise awareness without picking a fight with the president or risking the safety of our local staff and volunteers.

Working with our staff, volunteers and local partners, who include community and religious leaders in all the communities where we work, we have identified three effective strategies to address the issue:

1. Have all the young mothers who became pregnant while in school write their stories about how returning to school made a difference. So far, we have recruited 146 such mothers; some even work with government agencies in high-level positions.
2. Have all their parents or caretakers—men and women—write letters addressed to the Minister of Education. Letters should be copied to the President, the current First Lady, the former presidents and former first ladies.
3. Have all the children and husbands of the women who returned to school write letters to the President and Minister of Education.

ARK local staff and advisory board members have been in constructive meetings with several government officers, especially in the Ministry of Education. All ARK schools in Tanzania support young mothers returning to complete their educations. Some schools are also part of our “Adopt a Grandma” campaign.

Please make a special tax-deductible donation to provide continuous financial support to the “Don’t Punish Our Girls” campaign. Your kind gift will allow ARK to fight for these young women to continue their educations in 2018. Please consider donating today, as now is the time when registrations for the next school year begin.



A TESTIMONIAL

“I remember when I got pregnant after my HIV+ stepfather raped me when my mother was ill, I was helpless because he was the provider for the father as our father had also died from AIDS. On her death bed, my mom directed me to contact an HIV support group in Upanga near UNICEF offices where she had been receiving assistance. When I arrived at that center, I was met with volunteers both were HIV positive, they encouraged me to stay positive, a month later I found out I was pregnant and my mom had then died, stepfather had disappeared. At the Upanga center which was being ran by the ARK Foundation to support HIV positive mothers and their children, gave me hope.

Thankfully, I turned out to be HIV negative but my future looked so black with a baby, 2 siblings to care for at the age of 15years old and \$10 monthly rent to pay if we wanted to continue living in the same room mom rented. ARK center had free classes that I took advantage of during my pregnancy, by the time I had the baby I was ready to take my QT (similar to US, GED). I passed my QT test and went on to high school earlier than other students I graduated and went on to college because ARK supported not only my education but provided financial support that covered our rent.

Today, I work at Muhimbili National Hospital the biggest hospital in Tanzania, I graduated with a degree in nursing, ARK supported me all through, I will be writing my detailed story to support the campaign.

Today, I am a mother of three, a wife to a lawyer and contributor to the Tanzania economy.

Girls who get pregnant while in school need love but above all need support to continue with their education.” -
- *Ellenor Mpunda*, Dar es Salam, Tanzania