



## Editor's Note

Dear readers,

We are pleased to welcome you to the September 2022 CRPF quarterly newsletter. This edition presents two summaries of research presented at the monthly CRPF seminars. These are from papers on, 1) Child marriage cancellation in Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas of Amhara region: Experiences and implications, and 2) Strengthening the evidence base on approaches to tackle FGM and Child Marriage in Ethiopia's pastoralist communities in Afar and Somali regions.

It also addresses news on Young Lives latest blog pegged to the recent UN Transforming Education Summit in New York. We look forward to your comments, suggestions and contributions.

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## Girls and women risk slipping through the education net

Young Lives published a new blog pegged to the recent UN Transforming Education Summit in New York. The blog stressed the significance of providing a supportive and enabling environment for vulnerable girls and young women to stay in education safely, and with sufficient resources and time to study, without which, investment in school systems will have much lower returns.

This latest blog featured Beletch, an Ethiopian woman Young Lives has followed since childhood. Beletch was portrayed in one of a series of digital stories Young Lives created in 2019, in which young Ethiopians selected images to describe their experiences of young marriage and parenthood. Beletch explained how marrying young forced her to drop out of school leading to her having little control over her life choices.

In their new blog, YL Director Professor Catherine Porter, Dr Alula Pankhurst and Katherine Ford endorse the United Nations Transforming Education call to address foundational learning & argue that a supportive, enabling environment is also vital to keep all children in school. Read the blog here: <https://bit.ly/3TjY5FQ> and see more Young Lives qualitative research here: <https://bit.ly/3CPoR1X>.

## Research Summaries from CRPF presentations

### Child marriage cancellation in Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas of Amhara region: Experiences and implications Abeje Berhanu, PhD.

#### Introduction

This report presents the results of a study conducted within the Yes I Do programme in some of the intervention areas in Amhara region in Ethiopia in 2019 (Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas). The purpose of the study is to provide insights about the scope and the implications of child marriage cancellation with a focus on the experiences of adolescent girls and boys. Child marriage cancellation is an existing practice that required deeper exploration in order to inform programs aimed at eliminating child marriage and therefore it was selected as the focus theme for this qualitative research.

Ethiopia is one of the countries characterised by high rates of child marriage. About 40% of women aged 20-24 were first married or in union before turning 18, which is higher than the average for Eastern and Southern Africa (35%) and nearly two times the global average (21%) (UNICEF, 2018). According to the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, the median age at first marriage among women aged 20-49 is 17.5 at the national level and 16.2 in the Amhara region. In Ethiopia, child marriage is more common among adolescent girls in rural areas, from the poorest wealth quintile and among those with lower education levels. There is evidence of a declining trend in the prevalence of child marriage over the last ten years in Ethiopia. With an average annual rate of reduction of child marriage of 4.2, Ethiopia is one of the countries with the strongest progress in reducing the practice (UNICEF, 2018). The Amhara region is one of the regions that has made most progress. However, in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030, progress in Ethiopia will need to be 6 times faster than in the last 10 years (UNICEF, 2018). In recognition of this situation, various actors are working to further advance the elimination of child marriage. In 2013, the government of Ethiopia

launched a National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children to tackle child marriage and FGM/C. In 2015, a National Alliance to End Child Marriage was established as a response to the commitment made by the Government of Ethiopia at the Girl Summit held in UK in July 2014 to end both practices by 2025. The YES I DO program was introduced in 2016 in the Amhara region of Ethiopia as well as in other six countries. YES I DO is a strategic alliance of five Dutch organizations and their national counterparts, the main aim of which is to enhance the decision making space of young women about if, when and whom to marry as well as if, when and with whom to have children.

#### Methods

- The study is based on a qualitative research design.
- Four study sites were selected:
  - Two rural kebeles from Kewet woreda (Tere and Sefeberet)
  - Two rural kebeles from Bahir Dar Zuria woreda (Gombat and Wonjeta)
  - In-depth interviews were conducted with fourteen young women and men (11 females and 3 males).
  - Twelve Focus Group Discussions were conducted with young women and men as well as parents.
  - A total of 24 key informant interviews were conducted

#### Findings

Child marriage cancellation is common although the exact number of cases is unknown. The main drivers are an increased awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and about its illegality together with young people's desire to continue with their education instead. Child marriage cancellation can take place before the

wedding ceremony - at the proposal or planning stage - or after the wedding ceremony. When cancellation happens influences not only how cancellation is done and who intervenes but also the implications for adolescent girls in terms of reactions towards them and alternatives after the cancellation.

Adolescent girls play a central role in the cancellation although they cannot do it by themselves. They generally express their refusal first to their parents and relatives. When this does not work they turn to teachers, health workers or even the police. The intervention of the police can imply financial fees and detentions. In these cases the community and family reactions towards girls is more negative. Peers and teachers are the most supportive actors for girls. Evidence coming from program implementations shows that some girls cancel their early marriages with the involvement of members of the anti- harmful traditional practices (anti-HTP) committee, which include all levels of civil society actors. Generally, however, there is very limited support for adolescent girls and boys after child marriage cancellation despite the emotional burden they often carry. The alternatives after child marriage cancellation are similar to the ones available to youth in general; education, limited job opportunities, migration in the case of Kewet, or marriage.

- Strengthen the capacity of the women’s affairs office and anti HTP committee on collecting and compiling data on child marriage cancellation in coordination with the different key stakeholders involved in child marriage cancellation and its identification. This would facilitate having a complete overview of all child marriage cancellations and increasing accountability.
- Further research is needed to clarify what is considered child marriage cancellation, especially in the cases when the cancellation happens after the ceremony.
- There is a need for young girls to be informed on how they can cancel their child marriage. This could be provided by the members of young girls’ clubs. Capacity-building trainings could be provided to the members of the groups.
- It is important that schools, NGO workers and health workers have the tools to help adolescents coping with the emotional stress that they go through before, during and after the cancellation of their marriage. They also need to be able to inform adolescents about the possibilities and consequences of cancellation.
- Implement psychosocial interventions to support adolescents during and after child marriage cancellation.
- Sometimes it is difficult for girls to express their rejection of the marriage. Girls’ clubs could work with girls on how to improve intergenerational communication. Strategies to also involve out of school youth are also important.
- Role models have a great influence on a girl’s cancellation of her marriage. Girls see it as inspiring and as something they want to aspire to do. Linking role models with parents could be used in the same way. Parents and other family members involved in the planning of the marriage could learn about the role model’s stories and experiences.
- Awareness raising among parents on young people’s right to know about and consent to the marriage arrangements.
- It is important to train key actors such as teachers and the women’s affair officers on how to accompany or support girls after the cancellation of their marriage.
- Sensitization activities with fathers in particular are recommended, as fathers can be more reluctant to child marriage cancellation. These



- activities need to take into account the multiple factors that make fathers resist cancellation.
- Analyse the side effects that punitive strategies have on adolescent girls whose marriage is cancelled with the intervention of law enforcement actors as in these cases the reactions from community members can be more negative. Consider strategies to ensure support and close sensitive monitoring of these cases after cancellation.
  - Train staff of the legal and judicial sector to better inform adolescents about the legal status and implications of traditional marriages and promised marriages.
  - Strengthen the role of the anti HTP committee and its unit responsible for child marriage cancellation.
  - Strengthen the coordination between stakeholders and ensure alignment of child marriage cancellation interventions with the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C 2020-2024.
  - Awareness raising about cancellation of child marriage amongst family members, elders and religious leaders is needed. It is important to sensitize community members and parents about the burden that girls are placed under when cancelling their marriage.
  - It is important to develop programmes that address how child marriage cancellation affects boys. Masculinities influence boys' reactions to and experiences of child marriage cancellations. Moreover, the study found that it was more difficult for boys to continue with education after child marriage cancellations.
  - More tailor-made educational programmes that include vocational training are needed. They could specially focus on married or divorced young women who are still interested in having an education but are not able to follow school programmes.



## Research Summaries from CRPF presentations

### Strengthening the evidence base on approaches to tackle FGM and Child Marriage in Ethiopia's pastoralist communities in Afar and Somali regions Workneh Abebe

#### Introduction

Child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) have far-reaching consequences throughout the life course and across generations. As such, tackling these harmful practices has increasingly become a development priority. Ethiopia has made rapid progress in tackling child marriage and FGM/C over the past 20 years. Despite this, it is still one of the top five countries globally in terms of absolute numbers of girls who married as children. In addition, it is home to an estimated 25 million girls and women who have experienced FGM/C – the largest absolute number of any country in eastern and southern Africa.

Rates of child marriage and FGM/C vary widely across the country, with some regions showing significant reductions and others yet to experience progress. Afar and Somali regional states have the highest rates of FGM/C in Ethiopia (91% and 99% respectively of all women aged 15-49); Afar's median age of first marriage is lower than the national average (16.4 years compared to 17.5 years). In line with Ethiopia's National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C (2020–2024), as well as the country's commitment to achieving the SDG targets, this study aims to provide evidence on the current levels and drivers of FGM/C and child marriage in pastoral. It also sets

out the implications of the findings for policy and programming, including the implementation of the National Costed Roadmap.

### Methods

This is a longitudinal research evaluation that includes three rounds of data collection in 2022, 2024 and 2025.

The quantitative sample includes 2,042 households, split equally between Afar and Somali. In each region, data was collected in 9 kebeles (communities) where programming will be implemented, and 9 kebeles that will receive no programming. In each household (HH), a caregiver and an adolescent between the ages of 10 and 19 were surveyed. The qualitative sample includes a sub-sample of adolescents (n=295) and their caregivers (n=166) who participated in individual and group interviews, as well as key informant interviews (n=84) with regional and district-level government officials, clan and religious leaders, and service providers.

### Key findings

#### Education

- Nearly one third of adolescents in the study have never been enrolled, while among those enrolled in school the large majority are over-age for grade.
- Girls' access to education is worse than boys' – especially in Somali – due to conservative gender norms, poor WASH facilities at school and limited safety en route to school.

#### Economic empowerment

- Women are less likely to see themselves as 'earners' than men – they also own fewer productive assets.
- Somali women have more diverse livelihoods than Afar women.
- Women have more limited inputs into financial decision-making than men, especially from men's perspectives and especially in Afar.
- Somali women report that they engage in more independent financial decision-making than Afar women.

#### The patterning and drivers of FGM/C

- In Afar, girls are cut as infants. In Somali, they are cut in late childhood, sometimes with girls' input on timing.

- Mothers are the primary deciders concerning if and when girls will undergo FGM/C.
- A large majority of girls are cut by traditional cutters – but in Somali there is growing evidence of medicalisation.
- Across regions, study participants highlight cultural identity as the primary driver of FGM/C.
- Somali study participants are more likely to report a religious mandate for FGM/C than Afar participants.
- Study participants are more likely to report that FGM/C has benefits – primarily controlling girls' sexuality and ensuring their marriageability - than risks.
- Support for FGM/C depends on awareness of risks, and beliefs about benefits and religious mandate.
- FGM/C is not a 'one off' event – it results in a lifetime of pain and trauma.
- Knowledge of the law criminalising FGM/C is low overall; caregivers in Somali have less accurate knowledge of the law than those in Afar. In Somali, raising legal awareness may reduce support for the practice.
- In Afar, but not Somali, educating girls may be a promising strategy to reduce support for FGM/C – but economically empowering women may increase support for the practice.



***The patterning and drivers of child marriage***

- Few girls in the sample are already married, because most are too young – but child marriage is seen as normal in both contexts.
- Arranged marriage is common in Afar; most girls do not want to marry when they do. By contrast, in Somali, most marriages are adolescent driven.
- Few adolescents are aware that there is a legal minimum age for marriage, but across regions, most adolescents report that the ideal age of marriage is greater than 18.
- Girls are more likely to support child marriage than boys.
- Support for child marriage is shaped by community norms – where respondents believe it to be common, they are more likely to support it.
- Caregiver literacy reduces support for child marriage.
- There are intergenerational synergies – adults’ and adolescents’ beliefs about child marriage reinforce one another.
- Access to education reduces support for child marriage in Afar but not in Somali.
- In Somali, better off households are less likely to support child marriage – the reverse is true in Afar.
- In Somali, higher adolescent self-efficacy reduces support for child marriage.

**Policy and programming implications**

- Raise awareness of the law and penalise those who violate it.
- Work with girls and women, in regionally tailored ways, to shift the gender norms and practices that limit their lives.
- Work with boys and men to raise awareness of gender norms and to encourage the adoption of alternative masculinities.
- Work with clan and traditional leaders to raise awareness among communities to shift the practices and gender norms that disadvantage girls and women.
- Make sure that all girls have access to education, at least until the end of intermediate school, but ideally through to completion of secondary school.
- Use social protection to incentivise uptake of education – and to delay marriage.

- Work with health care providers to prevent medicalization.
- Ensure that the medicalization of FGM/C does not progress.
- Work with women and girls to improve their livelihood options.
- Work through regional government leaders in Afar and Somali to promote social and legal change for girls and women.
- Engage religious leaders to help eradicate FGM/C and child marriage and to shift the gender norms that lead to SGBV.
- Encourage non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to work with adults and adolescents to shift the gender norms and practices that limit girls’ and women’s lives.
- Scale up investment in efforts to eradicate both practices, informed by robust longitudinal evaluations.



**Interested to Know about CRPF?**

The Child Research and Practice Forum (CRPF) was established in 2010 to promote work on child research, policy and practice. CRPF makes use of monthly seminars, quarterly newsletters and annual publications as a means to achieve its objectives. The publications are also available at the Young Lives Ethiopia website. CRPF is organized by Young Lives with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and UNICEF.

If you want to know more, please contact us via [crpf.ethiopia@gmail.com](mailto:crpf.ethiopia@gmail.com)