

# Innovations

## Changing Social Norms on Child Marriage through a Legislative Change: A Case Study of the Revised Family Code Enforcement in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

*The Ethiopian Government took a major step to end the practice of child marriage in 2000 with the revision of the old 1960 Family Code. The revision pulled up the minimum legal age for marriage from 15 to 18 and made the practice of child marriage punishable in the criminal code for the first time. Revising the Family Code, however, was not going to end the practice by itself. The purpose of this case study is to find out hurdles that had to be addressed and overcome, and supplementary policies that were adopted to help end the practice of child marriage. The study identifies a long list of barriers to the effective implementation of the Revised Family Code including the existence of harmful social norms and practices, capacity gaps in the legal system, and limitations in access to media in large parts of the country. To overcome these and other “delivery challenges”, the leaders of the government and the civil society engaged the citizens and community leaders in public awareness campaigns, developed programs to empower women and children in local communities, and improved the judicial system, among other things. These interventions led to changes in social norms and public attitudes regarding child marriage, and more importantly, to a substantial reduction in child marriage throughout the country.*

**Key Terms:** Harmful social norms and traditions, delivery challenges, and the Revised Family Code

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### 1. Introduction

The Ethiopian Government took a major step to end the practice of child marriage in 2000 through the revision of the old 1960 Family Code. The revision pulled up the

legal minimum age for marriage from 15 to 18 and made the practice of child marriage punishable in the criminal code for the first time. Revising the Family Code, however, was not going to end the practice by itself. The intent of the study is to find out hurdles that had to be addressed and overcome, and supplementary policies that were adopted to help end the practice of child marriage.

Declaring core principles such as the minimum legal age for marriage and criminalization of child marriage, the 1964 International Convention of Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage (UN, 1964), and the Convention of the Right of the Child (UN, 1989), provided important impetuses to help end the practice of child marriage throughout the world. These and other related international agreements reflected a shared understanding of the harmful consequences of child marriage for women, their families, and their societies. Ethiopia was a signatory to the international conventions aforementioned, but the prevailing situations including social norms and socioeconomic conditions hampered the implementation of the principles that were requisite for the ending of child marriage (UNICEF, 2016). Many developing countries, including Ethiopia, enacted legislation to prohibit and criminalize the practice of child marriage (UNFPA, 2020).

Regarding the effectiveness of legislative initiatives to tackle and challenge deeply-embedded cultural practices, there are competing schools of thought. On one hand, we have optimists. Sunstein (1996) and McAdams (2000) argue that even if the legislation is not enforced effectively, it has an “expressive effect” which impacts attitudes, norms, behaviours, values, and traditions. Chen and Yeh (2014) revealed that simply delivering a message about formal law affects social norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in the United States of America. On the other hand, real-life experiences suggest that it might be very difficult, if not impossible, to overcome the steep barriers presented by entrenched social norms. For example, in India, the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 stipulated the punishment of a maximum of three months in jail and a fine not exceeding 1,000 rupees for the practice of child marriage. Nonetheless, not many cases were ever indicted in India. The Indian government revised the 1929 family laws in 2006 and increased the punishment of child marriage to 2 years and fines were extended to a maximum of 100,000 rupees. But UNICEF (2020) reported that from 2014 to 2016, only 1, 785 child marriages cases were reported to the officials; while 4,777 criminals were arrested, and only 274 convictions were made.

Researchers working on social standards have shown how social norms and traditions, and informal rules of acceptable behaviours are encouraging and

sustaining child marriage acts (e.g. see Shakya, *et al.*, 2014). Global evidence revealed the existence of social norms and traditions that encourage child marriage to sustain the practice in many parts of the world (see Daset *al.*, 2018; Cislighi and Bhattacharjee, 2017; Cislighi & Heise, 2018b; Sabateset *al.*, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Jain & Kurz, 2007; UNWOMEN, 2016 and Horner *al.*, 2017). The socioeconomic conditions that constrain choices for families in the developing world also interact with the prevalent social norms to further strengthen the influence of the social norms. Thus, it is not surprising that many developing countries still struggle in their endeavours to end the practice of child marriage.

Ethiopia has been able to make significant improvements in reducing incidences of child marriage since the adoption of the Revised Family Code in 2000. The legislative action was an important first step, but as many examples in the other countries demonstrate, it was not going to attain the stated goal by itself, as Ethiopia was beset with challenges that hamper the effective implementation of child marriage-related legislation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Power of social norms**

Nowadays the objectives of tackling the high incidences of child marriage practice and empowering girls and women get priority. In any society, women are key strategic groups for the sustainable economic development of a nation, yet they are the most mistreated category of society, disadvantaged in socio-economic welfare, and whose fundamental rights are extensively breached (Chabaan & Cunningham, 2011; Watsonet *al.*, 2010; Greeneet *al.*, 2009). More than socio-economic and political factors, harmful social rules and practices play a substantial responsibility in sustaining child marriage acts (Cooper & Fletcher, 2013; Watsonet *al.*, 2012; Huda & Calder, 2013). Different researches revealed that both national-level policy interventions, as well as local-level policy interventions, are effective in changing harmful traditional social norms (Dennyet *al.*, 2012; Marcus, 2014; Munoz *et al.*, 2012).

There are not many pieces of research that evaluate how policy interventions change harmful traditional social norms that sustain the practice of child marriage. Constantly enhancing the awareness of the community on the side-effects of harmful traditional social norms is one of the strategies to change the attitude of the community. The current perception of the power of social customs has heightened the social norms promotion movement (Poyntonet *al.*, 2010). Expansion of information, communication, and technology (ICT) facilitate the spread of

information that promotes gender equality and empowers women (Plan International, 2010).

## 2.2. Socioeconomic issues

Many scholars ignore the effect of socioeconomic factors on the effectiveness of exogenous policy interventions aimed to change social norms that sustain child marriage practice. On one hand, Ara and Das (2010) revealed an absence of significant impact of socioeconomic factors on the effectiveness of BRAC's ADP program in Bangladesh. On the other hand, Amin and Suran (2005) found BRAC-run Kishori Abhijan to be the most effective for the younger and poorer districts with a high level of treatment. Erulkar and Muthengi (2007) revealed how poverty matters for evaluating the effectiveness of the Berhane Hewan policy intervention in Ethiopia for social norms change. Erulkar and Muthengi reported that poverty significantly affects the effectiveness of the Berhane Hewan program. Leerlooijer *et al.*, (2013) qualitatively showed that poverty is a major factor that hinders girls' and women's educational attainment. Leerlooijer *et al* concluded that even if the Teenage Mothers Support Project (in Uganda) plays a crucial part in altering social norms, poverty still hinders girls' educational attainment.

The fact that many researchers concluded a positive impact of policy intervention on the social mobility of teenage girls and young ladies shows the point where harmful traditional social norms have started changing. Ishraq (Egypt), both BRAC's GQAL (Bangladesh), and Better Life Options and DISHA, in India increase girls' and women's gender equality promotion programs that encourage girls' mobility (Selim *et al.*, 2013; Alim, 2011; Nathaniel *et al.*, 2009). For non-formal education programs and community dialogues, it is difficult for scholars to evaluate their effect on girls' and women's mobility. Selim *et al* (2013) revealed that Ishraq (in Egypt) significantly increases adolescent girls' mobility within their communities and has enabled program participants to attend classes in youth centres once reserved for boys. This implies a significant change of norms for girls and women to be allowed to use public spaces (*ibid*). In India (Better Life Options and DISHA) and Bangladesh (BRAC's GQAL) policy interventions achieved significant change in girls' mobility for treated observations relative to controlled observations (Alim, 2011; Nathaniel *et al.*, 2009). Alim (2011) revealed that there is a significant change in perception of the community in the places that girls freely go for treated observations relative to controlled observations. Nathaniel *et al.*, (2009) showed that participation in the 'Better Life Option' program significantly increased girls' mobility by 42 percent for observations that were fully treated relative to untreated observations.

Vaughan *et al.*, (2000) examined the effectiveness of APWE PLEZI in St. Lucia policy intervention on the attitudes of the community toward a wife working in a paid job without her husband's permission. The findings have shown an absence of significant changes in attitudes of the communities towards wives working without their husbands' permission. On the other hand, Nathaniel *et al.*, (2009) revealed an absence of significant difference in attitudes of the communities between regular and irregular attendants in the Better Life Options program in India. The study shows that the two groups develop additional democratic viewpoints on gender roles. The difference was bigger for observations that were fully treated relative to observations that were partially treated (*ibid*). Nathaniel *et al.* revealed the effectiveness of Better Life Option programs in India towards gender-egalitarian work-related factors. The program significantly improved the gender-egalitarianism towards work-related factors by 44 percent.

Different scholars examined the effectiveness of three programs (Humqadam, Ishraw, and PRACHAR) designed to change social customs that sustain the practice of child marriage (see Rozan, 2012; Daniel & Nanda, 2012; Pathfinder, 2011). In these programs, the attitudes of participants towards women working in paid jobs had changed. But the majority of the participants from the Humqadam policy intervention believe that men are the breadwinner in the households (Rozan, 2012). Rozan reported that the program influenced the majority of community members to change discriminatory norms and recommends implementing long-period policy intervention for grassroots social norm changes. Daniel and Nanda (2012) and Pathfinder (2011) assessed the effectiveness of Pracher's social norms change policy interventions in India. This social norm change policy intervention was implemented for more than 10 years with the focus of enhancing the awareness of the community on reproductive health issues and the campaign for gender-balanced stances towards work.

Policy intervention that empowers women is very important to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Marcus and Page (2014b) examined different policy interventions to change social norms in Vietnam, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Uganda that aimed to transform the lives of girls and young ladies. They revealed that gender prejudiced social standards, attitudes, and behaviours supported by poverty, deprivation, and exclusion serve to aggravate the vulnerability of girls and women.

### 2.3. Understanding and measuring changes in harmful social norms

Many policies and decision-makers believe in the importance of changing social norms, attitudes, and behaviours that sustain child marriage practice. Therefore, it is important to understand more about planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policy interventions that could change the attitudes, norms, and behaviours that sustain child marriage practice. The best strategy recommended by different scholars to change harmful social norms is the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) strategy. According to the KAP strategy enhancing the awareness and knowledge of the community, will change social norms and practices that sustain child marriages. On the other hand, Westoff (1988) argued that improving knowledge did not guarantee the change of social norms, attitudes, and practices. Westoff argued that currently the hostility against females significantly increased and a new form of violence is continuously emerging such as violence through misogyny in cyberspace. Michau *et al* (2015) revealed that enhancing the knowledge about harmful traditional social norms alone is not adequate to stop child marriage acts. Michau *et al* reported that despite mass acknowledgment that the child marriage act is wrong and must be criminalized, it is still widely practiced in many developing countries. Furthermore, girls and women cooperate with the practice despite their knowledge about the side effects of child marriage.

Another basic question that policy makers need to ask ourselves is what could change people's ways of behaving, other than knowledge. Paluck and Ball (2010) defined social norm as a belief of the community about specific issues or the stand of the majority on that practice. In the process of changing social norms sustainable and deeper change in attitudes and behaviour must be achieved. Social norm change is not only the change of what individuals do or believe. A significant change in social norms needs deeper change about what the community, family, and nation at large believe and to what degree they accept the new idea and are ready to implement it. Social norms play a critical part in the success of females because they built strong expectations and behaviour supported by sanctions and rewards (Alexander-Scott *et al.*, 2016). The basic question that decision-makers commonly ask is 'are norms altered by launching new knowledge and ideas for permanent behaviour?' The knowledge, attitudes, and practice gaps suggest that changing social norms and practice need strong effort and commitment – it is not an easy task. In addition to enhancing the knowledge of the community about social norms and practice, it is very important to design policy interventions that aim to quantitatively measure the effect of social norms and how they shape the attitudes of the community.



#### 2.4. Review of effectiveness of various policy interventions

Scholars confirmed that radio-or film-based policy intervention with believable stories is effective to change social norms (Koch & N'Kolo, 2011; Rogers *et al.*, 1999; Singhal *et al.*, 2004). For effective delivery of non-formal community-level policy intervention, policymakers need to consider two points (Marcus & page, 2014). First, intensive contact with the grassroots community is essential. This could change the attitude of the community towards harmful social norms and their effect on maternal and child health. Second, practitioners of the program should be selected from the local community as they know well the culture and tradition of their community. These local practitioners should be girls who have completed their education successfully and are working in paid jobs. Thus, they can act as role models (*ibid*).

Another important strategy aimed at changing social norms is to allow girls to freely express their feelings and opinions on the topic under consideration. Currently, Ishraq in Egypt, Better Life Options, Choices, and New Horizons in India empower girls to freely express their feeling without any restrictions (Marcus & page, 2014). An impact evaluation of Taru, DISHA and GEMS (in India), IPA (in Zambia)- shows that these programs have a positive impact on reducing child marriages and have helped in eliminating harmful social norms that sustain the tradition of child marriages (CMS, 2004). This finding corroborates the findings of Malhotra *et al.* (2011) who evaluate the impact of 23 policy interventions on changing harmful traditional social norms that sustain child marriage practice. Singhal *et al.* (2004) revealed that policy interventions that nurture information, skills, and network for girls and women and use community mobilization campaigns, significantly changed the social norms that sustain the child marriage practice.

Nathaniet *al.* (2009) and Assaadet *al.* (2007) investigated the effects of the difference in exposure intensity on change of attitudes and behaviour toward harmful traditional social customs that support the practice of child marriage. Nathaniet *al.* (2009) evaluated the impact of policy intervention for regular and irregular participants on changing attitudes towards harmful traditional social norms. Their findings show that girls' desired age of marriage significantly increased for both regular and irregular participants (with only one percentage point difference between the two groups). On the other hand, Assaadet *al.* (2007) examined the impact of the differences in exposure intensity for Ishraq (adolescent girls' development program in Egypt). Assaadet *al.* showed that the lengthier the exposure to the intervention, the prevalence of child marriage decline from 28 percent to 1 percent. The study also shows that the impact of the program is greater for both groups of participants (fully treated and partially treated) relative to participants in the control group. These researchers attribute the difference in

attitude to the preferred age of marriage between girls who are fully treated and those that are partially treated as the difference in initial attitudes.

In many developing countries interventions aimed to change social norms, have no significant effect on attitudes of the community towards the educational attainment of girls and women (see Chege *et al.*, 2001 for Kenya) or they exhibit a positive effect on improving general education (e.g. Diop, 2004 for Senegal). Alim (2011) revealed that in Bangladesh the policy intervention that aimed to enhance the school enrolment of girls has no significant impact on the attitude of the community toward prioritizing boys' education. Alim revealed that parents invest more in boys' education than girls' education. There is a big education disparity between boys and girls in the community. On the other hand, Elbadawy (2013) confirmed the existence of a selection problem in examining Ishraq's impact in Egypt on the attitudes of Ishraq's participants on females' education. Erulkar and Muthengi (2007) evaluate the influence of the Berhane Hewan program on the educational attainment of girls in Ethiopia. Their finding revealed an insignificant effect on school enrolment for girls older than 15 and a significant increase in school enrolment rate for girls younger than 15.

## **2.5. Demand and supply side policy interventions to change social norms**

The policy intervention to change the practice of social norms can be divided into two major categories: demand-side and supply-side policy interventions (Watson, 2014). The demand side policy interventions aim to enhance the awareness of the community on the legal and normative issues of the child marriage practice. On the other hand, creating an inclusive macroeconomic environment including investment in service provision and establishing grassroots support structure and platforms is categorized under the supply-side policy interventions. To change these harmful customs, the supply, and demand-side policy interventions should interact effectively (*ibid*). Both demand and supply-side policy interventions feed each other and work effectively if they interact successfully. For example, through the 'educating girls is educating nation campaign', in Uganda and Vietnam, the social value of girls' education is significantly enhanced but the absence of accessible secondary education hinders to meet its end goal (*ibid*). To successfully end the practice of child marriage and achieve gender-egalitarianism, an equal investment in both the supply and demand-side policy interventions is important.

On the other hand, there is enough evidence of gender discrimination in school through sexual harassment of women, for example, in Uganda (Cislagh *et al.*, 2019).



High investment in education aiming to end harmful social practice by itself is not successful unless backed by comparable investment in the macroeconomic environment of the nation to create employment opportunities for girls (Watson, 2014). Communities give low value to girls' education. If the macroeconomic environment of the nation cannot create job opportunities, it could be used as justification for the low value of girls' education. Thus, the demand and supply side of policy interventions to end the child marriage act should move in parallel.

The effort to end this harmful act through enhancing awareness of girls and women about their rights is ineffective unless supported by significant investment in legal protection and redress services. Rather it may cause the disempowerment of girls and women since they cannot protect themselves. For example, the absence of effective enforcement and penalty against child marriages and underage sexual relations leave girls and women unprotected in Uganda. One of the major supply-side policy intervention gaps is the absence of adolescent-friendly reproductive health information and services (Cislagh *et al*, 2019). Uganda's defilement law criminalizes sexual intercourse whether it is consensual or not, with girls younger than 18, and the national adolescent health policy call for access to reproductive health information and service. But in practice, it is very difficult to get this service. In Uganda, the absence of this service causes a high prevalence of unwanted pregnancies which aggravates the practice of child marriage in the country (*ibid*).

## **2.6. Strategies to change social norms**

Oxfam's Knowledge Hub (2011) recommends using social movement campaigns to change social norms. Social movements' campaigns play a critical role in introducing a new social behaviour alternative or completely changing old social norms and practices. Marcus and Harper (2015) revealed how social movements/social campaigns significantly change social norms that promote early, childhood, and forced marriage in a community. Roper (2011) reported that in El Salvador the community uses social movements/campaigns to get attention from policy and decision-makers to change harmful customs and traditions. Their social movement includes both social campaigning and direct advocacy for government officials, enforcement bodies, the judiciary, public servants, and the school community. Marcus and Harper (2015) based on the social learning theory, recommend using a role model person as a key catalyst for individual attitudes and social norms change. The role model person might be well-known persons such as celebrities, religious and community leaders, well-known professors, etc who could convince the community to adopt new attitudes and norms. Ricardo *et al*. (2011) concluded that harmful social norms are learned from community and family and

they could be replaced by positive alternatives through long-term policy interventions. Jewkes *et al.*, (2015) warn about hegemonic masculinity which describes a man as strong, a warrior, or a leader. Oxfam uses civil society leaders as role models in media campaigns (Oxfam, 2011). Mujeres (2011) evaluate the effectiveness of school-based programs in empowering girls and women by using well-known stories, such as the 'Little Red Riding Hood' in drama form. The program significantly empowered women and was integrated into the school curriculum as part of the literature set books.

### **3. Methods and instruments of the Study**

#### **3.1. Research approach**

Berg (2011) and Creswell (2007) reported that qualitative research design is important when researchers are interested in understanding the beliefs and attitudes of a community about the topic under consideration. Given that the central research questions concern evolution of customs and attitudes associated with child marriage, the author decided to take advantage of the qualitative research approach to get more deep, valuable, and reliable information.

Qualitative research may take on a range of different strategies (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In this chapter, the author specifically follow the science of delivery methods (Widner, 2015). A legislative change in the form of the Revised Family Code was not going to end this harmful practice in Ethiopia by itself, as the practice was sustained through the powerful interplay between strong traditional social norms and various socioeconomic factors. An integrated package of supplementary interventions was called for to address various hurdles both on the demand and the supply side of the phenomenon of child marriage. Needless to say, some of them were unanticipated, and close coordination of many agencies and civic groups was integral for a successful transition. The science of delivery approach is designed to effectively document various aspects of implementation challenges that are bound to come into play in such a complicated context.

#### **Knowledge types of Science of Delivery approaches**

The science of delivery case study brings together four types of knowledge (Widner, 2015):

1. It focuses on a problem or activity that is important and difficult within a given policy sphere. Science of delivery refers to this problem as **the development challenge**.

2. It tracks **the implementation process** and shows how the actions taken by a reform team contributed to the result and addressed anticipated delivery challenges as well as unexpected obstacles. The implementation process is the sequence of steps taken to put the policy or intervention into practice. It may include organizational changes and behavioral change, among other elements. These steps and their relationship to each other will vary from case to case.
3. It highlights **the delivery challenges** that are likely to arise during the implementation and the anticipated political economy problems that stem from the character of the activity and /or from the context. The science of the delivery approach cases shows public servants working to solve political economy problems that affect implementation.
4. Throughout, it pays attention to the influence of location-specific and time-specific circumstances on the response to the development challenge. These **contextual conditions** range from leadership aptitudes and variations in political will to whether disasters, social structures, belief systems, and electoral pressures. Contextual knowledge includes not only familiarity with the politics, economy, and socio-cultural circumstances of the country and or community concerned, but also awareness of important sector-specific technical information and how it might shape implementation. Context shapes the initial opening for reform, political will, problem definitions, delivery challenges, and responses to results.

### 3.2. Data type and source

The study used primary data that were obtained through interviews and focus group discussions. For further cross-validation, secondary data were collected from the published and unpublished data sources. Ethiopia is a federal country comprising 10 regions and 2 federal-level city administrations. To collect the necessary data, I randomly select one zone from each region. Because of the existing civil war, I could not collect necessary data from the Tigray region. In total, data were collected from 9 zones and two federal-level city administrations.

- a. **Key informant interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the key informants to collect qualitative information. Participants of key informant interviews were purposively selected based on their knowledge, age, experience, educational status, and ties with the issue under investigation as well as their ability to give necessary information. The author used face-to-face and over-the-phone interviews. The author recorded the

interview proceedings and also took notes manually by writing the main points during the interviews.

- b. Focus group interviews (FGI):** Focus group interviews help the researcher to explore shared beliefs and experiences among participants (Cislaghi & Heise, 2017). FGI's allow participants to discuss their common social norms and beliefs and to reach a consensus on how to end the practice.

### **3.3. Target population**

The study targets observers that have direct ties with the practice of child marriage from various parts of the country which includes: the enforcement officers, judiciary personnel, Directors from the Ministry of Women's and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Bureau of Women's and Social Affairs, Bureau of Justice, Vital Events Registration Agency, men and women, young and old community members, journalists, religious leaders, preachers, health officers, psychologists/counselors, and teachers.

### **3.4. Sampling techniques and sample size determination**

Key informants were chosen purposively centred on the premise that they are previewed to the knowledge concerning the topic under scrutiny and therefore would provide sufficient, deep, and reliable data. This was conducted by employing a purposive non-probability sampling technique. In this regard, the researcher collected detailed and reliable information from the key informants. The basic supposition of employing purposive sampling is the capability of selecting strategically adequate data for the study (Kothari, 2004). I conducted 53 interviews with different interviewees from all over the country and due to the political crisis in the country, interviews outside Addis Ababa were conducted over the phone. I have conducted 3 focus group discussions: in the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and Addis Ababa Vital Event Registration Office. Each focus group discussion consisted of 6 directors and practitioners of the RFC.

### **3.5. Method of data analysis**

The study employed qualitative research methods. Thus, data were analysed through qualitative data analysis methods under the framework of the science of delivery approach of case study writing. Qualitative data that were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions were categorized, organized, and analysed concurrently and thematically through narration and explanation. First, I familiarized myself with the data, reading all the scripts critically many times. Initial

codes/themes were then generated. I repeatedly reviewed and polished the themes, looking for internal coherence and external heterogeneity across the themes. I incorporated all comments and suggestions from my supervisor until we reached an overall agreement on analysis.

#### **4. Development challenges**

The key development challenge is to safeguard the fundamental human rights of children and women. Child marriage violates the fundamental human rights of children and females. To address these developmental challenges, the Ethiopian Government has enforced different strategies and approaches to end child marriage. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia protects fundamental human rights including women's rights. In line with the national constitution, the government revised the 1960s family code and criminal code to defend girls and women from harmful social norms and practices including child marriage. There are also additional policies and packages designed to address harmful social norms and practices such as the National Policy on Ethiopian Women, and the Ethiopian Women's Development and Change Package.

Child marriage negatively affects girls' long-run development plans through early pregnancy, social isolation, school drop-out, loss of opportunity to join the formal labor market, and exposure to gender-based violence (Koski, 2017 and Rasmussen *et al.*, 2019). The negative impacts of child marriage also affect the macroeconomic growth and stability of the nation at large. By limiting the attainment of education, child marriages harm girls' participation in productive sectors. After marriage, even if the young child manages to continue her education or formal work, mostly she is very busy with domestic work, pregnancy, and pregnancy-related issues, and caring for poor health children (*ibid*).

The majority of girl-children who married before the legal age of marriage gave birth at a young age. On the other hand, since they are not physically and mentally mature to go through long labour associated with birthing, mostly girl children are at risk of Rectovaginal Fistula. Ethiopia's Government established Fistula Hospital because of the endemic nature of the problem in the country. In Ethiopia, due to child marriages, child mortality increased by 4 percent, and the risk of stunting by 13 percent (MoWSA, 2019). Child brides have no friends and are isolated from their peers, and the chance to take part in community development programs is lost. Due to their domestic work, responsibility to care for children, and strict control on their mobility, child brides are socially isolated. A report shows that more than 30 percent of child brides have no friends (*ibid*). Because of the difficult life they experience,

child brides are endangered by different psychological and physiological problems which lead to divorce or suicide. Many child brides live in unhappy marriages. Particularly for girl children who are not physically and sexually ready for sexual intercourse, forced sexual intercourse with her husband could be traumatic. Child brides may not be mature enough to care for or have control over a child's health and education investment. The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, claims that child marriage is the major source of early childbearing for 4 in 5 women who gave birth before 18 years. The number of children per woman is increased by 24 percent for the girl child who married before 13 years relative to those who married after the minimum legal age of marriage (ibid).

One of the alternatives that potential child brides use for them not to be involved in child marriages is to abscond. Some of them migrate domestically and others migrate internationally normally to the Middle East. In Ethiopia, if girls pass puberty and are unmarried, the community considers them to behave in “inappropriate ways” and many young children are unable to stand the discrimination and scrutiny and choose to migrate. The adoption of migration by young children to avoid child marriage and to ensure their right to self-determination is often challenged by the lack of opportunity for self-explanation and agency, which in turn exposes them to new risks and threats. Erulkar (2004) revealed the existing situation of the girl child who migrates domestically such as low-status jobs, less pay, no friends, and no close friends to borrow money in case of emergencies. Young children that migrate to the Middle East are also experiencing the same difficulties and challenges. The majority of them experienced physical and sexual abuse. Child marriage significantly restricts their voice and agency, it also impacts their mobility, and fertility, and increases gender-based violence. Erulkar (2004) found that child brides are less likely to discuss their family size, HIV/AIDS, issues related to their health services or their children's, and the issues of faithfulness in marriage. The report from the Ethiopian Ministry of Women and Social Affairs revealed that around 30 percent of young children who married before 15 discussed HIV/AIDS prevention with their husbands relative to around 56 percent for women who married at 18 or 19 (MoWSA, 2019).

Various global, continental and domestic laws and regulations conclude that child marriage is a violation of the rights of women and girls. The practices of child marriage support gender-based discrimination and inequality, and negatively affect the health, living standards, productivity, and self-determination of women and girls. The negative impact of child marriage has an inter-generational influence both on the girl-child and her offspring. Commonly, child marriage is the major cause of girl children dropping out of school. Child marriage exposes girls to gender-based



violence (GBV), and a lack of opportunity to join the labor market because of early motherhood and strict control from her family-in-law.

## **5. Contexts and the key policy intervention**

### **5.1. Global and continental context**

International institutions such as the UN's Committee on the Child's Rights recognize that child marriage is a destructive practice and strive for its prohibition. At the fourth UN International Conference on Women in Beijing, which took place in 1995, all actions and activities needed to be taken to alleviate the problem of child marriage were outlined, which included creating educational plans for the families about early marriage. In this regard, the United Nations Human Rights Council embraced a resolution to "eliminate child marriage, early and forced marriage". Likewise, the SDGs include eliminating child marriage (targets 5.3) within the broader goal of gender equality. Africa policy and decision-makers reached a consensus about the inhumanity and illegality of child marriage and develop different policies and institutions for the practice. These policies and institutions request the abolition of harmful traditional social norms and practices. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990, strictly forbids the practice of child marriage as well as the cohabitation of girls and boys before the legal minimum age of marriage. This charter also requests African governments to set the legal minimum age of marriage at 18. The other continental level policy intervention is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003). This protocol calls for all countries to forbid and condemn all forms of harmful traditional social norms and practices.

The Africa Youth Charter (2006) is also another continental level policy intervention ratified by the Ethiopian Government. This charter requires all parties to develop and enforce policy and legislation that prohibit all forms of violence like female genital mutilation, child marriage, rape, and sexual abuse against girls and women in Africa. It also orders the taking of necessary action to eliminate all harmful social norms and practices in the continent. The legislation and institution developed to end child marriage on the continent also have the support of the African Union (AU). For example, the recent movements to end child marriage in Africa have gotten a golden opportunity and a major boost to make significant progress through major decisions and protocols of the African Union.

## 5.2. National context

In support of international and regional legal frameworks, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's constitution protects fundamental human rights for the nation, nationalities, and people of Ethiopia. To eliminate harmful traditional social norms and practices that affect children and women, the constitution has a particular provision for the rights of girls and women. The National Policy on Ethiopian Women of 1993 is also a major policy and institutional measure enforced to protect girls and women. To incorporate international conventions and charters accepted by the Ethiopia Government which are important to end harmful traditional social norms and practices and child marriage, the national government conducted several legal reforms in the country. Article 35(4) of the Ethiopian Constitution, which calls for the eradication of harmful social customs, provides for equality between men and women in all aspects and rights including the rights to equality in marriage; maternity leave with full pay. The equality also extends to the full consultation in national development issues, acquisition administration controlling, using, and transferring of property; emphasizing land and inheritance issues as well as equal employment, pay, and promotion.

## 5.3. Key policy intervention

The key policy intervention that has been taken by the Ethiopian government to end the practice of child marriage is the revision of the 1960s Family Code and Criminal Code. The Revised Family Code (RFC) was approved by the Federal Government in 2000. It incorporates different provisions that protect the rights of children and women which include the right of consent for marriage, the minimum legal age at first marriage, and the ban on bigamy in marriage (Articles 6, 7, and 8 of RFC).

### **Article 6: Consent**

A valid marriage shall take place only when the spouses have given their free and full consent.

### **Article 7: Age**

1. Neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude the marriage.
2. Notwithstanding the provisions of Sub-Article (1) of this Article, the Minister of Justice may, on the application of the future spouses, or the parents or guardian of one of them, for serious cause, grant dispensation of not more than two years.

### **Article 11: Bigamy**

A person shall not conclude marriage as long as he is bound by bonds of a preceding marriage.

Furthermore, for effective implementation of the RFC, Federal Government approved the Revised Criminal Code in 2005. The Revised Criminal Code states the range of punishment for a person who concludes a marriage with a minor from 3 to 7 years. Article 648 of the Criminal Code states that 'whoever concludes marriage with a minor apart from circumstances permitted by relevant Family Code is punishable with: a) rigorous imprisonment not exceeding three years, where the age of the victim is thirteen years or above; or b) rigorous imprisonment not exceeding seven years, where the age of the victim is below thirteen years.' The Revised Criminal Code further extends the punishment to any individuals that participate in the process of child marriage. The practice of child marriage is one of the most harmful traditional practices against the fundamental rights of children. Thus, articles 569 and 570 of the Revised Criminal Code (2005), indicate the punishment for individuals that participate in the practice of child marriage.

### **Article 569: Participation in Harmful Traditional Practices**

A parent or any other person, who participates in the commission of one of the crimes specified in this Chapter, is punishable with simple imprisonment not exceeding three months, or a fine not exceeding five hundred Birr.

## **6. Delivery challenges**

### **6.1. Social norms and cultural challenges**

One of the factors that challenge the effective implementation of the RFC is the harmful traditional social norms and practices.

Our respondents from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs said that:

Harmful traditional social norms and practices are one of the major factors that sustain child marriage practice in Ethiopia. The level of literacy in Ethiopia is very low. The majority of the community believes in traditional social norms and values. Children also engage themselves in child marriage because of their wrong beliefs influenced by social norms and traditions. The common social norms that encourage child marriage practice are: bearing a child at an early age is a blessing, being unmarried after menarche is sinful, unmarried at an early age may cause qomoqar (left standing) or haftuu (unwanted), the culture of taking bride price, those girls unmarried during early age are forced to marry old persons or persons that have children from another marriage. Most families prefer child marriage because of social norms and traditions that denounce

girls' sexual intercourse and pregnancy before marriage. To keep the reputation of families they opt for child marriage as a preferable alternative.

Most policy interventions to control child marriage practices have stressed empowering girls to refuse and report child marriage requests. But, due to deep-rooted social norms and practices, some girls cooperate with their parents to sustain the practice of child marriage. Since these social norms and practices are deep-rooted by religious customs, it couldn't be easy to eliminate them from the community. In some places, young children prefer to marry before the legal age of marriage because of their beliefs and traditions moulded by social norms and limited opportunity for education and accessing the formal labour market.

Furthermore, the community's low value for girls' education and the absence of alternative opportunities for girls who drop out of school, sustain the practice of child marriage. Our respondents from local public administration offices listed factors that sustain the practice of child marriage:

Some of the factors [that] sustain the practice of child marriage are lack of awareness [about] the Revised Family Code, high-level poverty, inaccessibility of secondary education, social norms, culture, belief, and traditional public [saying]. The majority of our respondents underlined the effect of social norms, beliefs, cultures, and traditional public saying on sustaining the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is home to many nations, nationalities, and peoples with different cultures, customs, beliefs, and traditions. Unfortunately, in terms of sustaining the practice of child marriage, these cultures, customs, beliefs, and traditions have significant roles.

The response suggests that although the cultures, customs, beliefs, and traditions in Ethiopia are diverse, they all encourage early marriages. The majority of Ethiopia's community believes that marriage at an early age is a reputation for both family and the girl child. A girl child who delayed her marriage is considered a spinster. Thus, the existence of diversity in culture, traditions, norms, and customs muddles the objective of changing harmful traditional social norms that sustain the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia.

## **6.2. Coordination and engagement challenges**

The other major delivery challenge identified by our respondents is the lack of effective coordination. There is disagreement on roles and responsibility-sharing both at the federal and regional levels. In its nature, the RFC implementation is a cross-cutting issue. Different federal and regional governments should take part in

the task of enforcing the RFC and ending the practice of child marriage. For example, respondents from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs said that: Most influential federal institutions compete to secure the task of controlling the practice of child marriage and its budget. If specific interventions to end child marriage are fully funded, different executive bodies compete to accomplish the tasks. On the other hand, if there is no assigned budget no one takes the initiative and responsibility to accomplish the task. Ending child marriage is a cross-cutting issue. In principle, they need to use their annual budget and mainstream interventions in their annual plan, to contribute to the process of ending child marriage practice. The key implementing partners of the RFC and ending the practice of child marriage are the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Journalist/Media and communication, law enforcement bodies, regional and local administration offices. The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, as the main actor of the RFC, facilitates the incorporation of the issue of implementing the RFC across all sectors. For example, the Ministry of Education needs to incorporate the RFC and the side effects of child marriage in their education curriculum, the Ministry of Health needs to incorporate it in their five-year sector plan, and the same for others. Even if many sectors have already incorporated the issue of enforcing the Revised Family Code, because of the absence of a specific budget, most of the activities are not effectively implemented. Our respondents conclude that the absence of agreed roles and shared responsibilities affect the effective implementation of the Revised Family Code.

### **6.3. Legislation and regulation challenges**

Many of our respondents confirmed that justice for child marriage-related cases is delayed. The legal framework needs improvement in terms of flexibility for the girl child to express their feelings and emotions freely. The majority of our respondents revealed inflexibility and bureaucratic administrative structure from top to the bottom for the girl child to express her feelings and pain. Corruption and maladministration outweighed the justice system in the country. For example, on January 7, 2022, at a media brief of Ethiopian Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed said: Our justice system is very complicated. There is no fair justice system in the country. Most enforcement and judiciary bodies are highly affected by corruption and maladministration: bribery, ethnicity, or other related matters highly affect our justice system.

A high level of poverty contributes to the existence of unfair justice in the country. Ethiopia is a developing country. According to data from the Central Statistical Agency, more than 30 million Ethiopians are in absolute poverty. This high level of poverty increases the chance that public officials practice corruption and

maladministration in the country. Our respondents from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs said that:

One of the biggest challenges for effective enforcement of the Revised Family Code is corruption and maladministration in law enforcement bodies. In the past few years, the macro economy of Ethiopia has been affected by different factors including the COVID-19 pandemic; civil war; and drought. So the living standard of citizens is continuously declining. To survive, the probability of enforcement bodies participating in corruption is increasing.

The other challenge for poor enforcement of the Revised Family Code emanates from local public officials and enforcement bodies being the ones violating the law. Most local-level public officials and enforcement bodies practice child marriage by themselves. Even though they are educated and have awareness about the RFC and the side effects of the practice of child marriage, they nonetheless, practice child marriage. Our respondents from the Amhara regions said that:

The major challenge for effectively enforcing the laws and order against the practice of child marriage is the complexity of the issues. Most local public officials and enforcement bodies including police officers practice child marriage. Thus, the chance to get information about planned child marriage declined or we couldn't get evidence to bring the offenders to justice. This also discourages the victim from reporting the issue to the police officers.

#### **6.4. Limited access to the media**

Media play a significant role in changing social norms and practices that encourage the practice of child marriage. On the other hand, the accessibility of formal media is very low in Ethiopia. According to the data from Digital (2021), only 20 percent of Ethiopians have access to the Internet, less than 40 percent have access to mobile phones, only 5.8 percent use social media and according to Central Statistical Agency (CSA) data, 55 percent watch television, and 37.4 percent listen to the radio. The data reveals that the majority of the Ethiopian population has no access to media. Government should do a lot to enhance awareness of the community on the Revised Family Code, the side effect of child marriage, and the advantage of educating a woman. Our respondent from Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority said:

Our media is one of the most accessible media in Ethiopia. We designed different awareness creation programs sharing the side effects of child marriage. Particularly, during the early approval of the RFC, we designed different programs to enhance the awareness of the community about the new policy and its consequence in case of violation. We delivered a documentary film about the effect of child marriage on a young child. At this time we have a weekly awareness creation program on harmful



traditional social norms, child marriage, child rights violence, gender-based violence, empowering women, and other programs related to children and women. Still, the majority of the community members have low regard for girls' education since they believe that they will leave their families' houses upon getting married. Thus, the majority of girl children are forced to marry before the legal minimum age at marriage. One of our respondents from the Fana Broadcasting Authority said: Fana Broadcasting Authority developed different programs on child marriage, child human rights, and women's domestic violence. But most of the time to work actively in these areas, we lack the budget and technical support. There are no interest groups, sponsors, or partners that work with Fana Broadcasting Authority in this area. To work at the grassroots level, we need sponsors and partners that have an interest to work with us. Fana Broadcasting Authority calls for the government and all parties to enhance the accessibility of both formal and informal media coverage in the country. It is better to use community leaders, religious leaders, preachers, elders, teachers, doctors, and police officers to enhance the awareness of the community about child marriages.

#### **6.5. Underdevelopment and poverty**

There is a vicious cycle between poverty, financial, human, and technical resources, and child marriage. In a society where child marriage is sustained, the level of poverty is very high. A young child that marries at an early age is not economically, financially, and psychologically independent. They will drop out of school and give birth while they are still minors. This affects the health of both the mother and the child. Girl children that drop their education become dependent on their husbands and family. Our respondents from the South Nation, Nationalities, and People of Ethiopia region responded that:

The major reason that sustains the practice of child marriage is the high level of poverty in the country. The majority of Ethiopian society is poor. In particular, poverty is very high in the rural part of the country. In this society, the family can't cover the basic needs of their children. They use child marriage as one alternative to reduce the burden of raising their daughters. The Bureau of Women and Social Affairs designed different programs that empower women through Women Development Groups.

Thus, in the community where the practice of child marriage is very high, poverty is also very high and the opposite is also true. Poverty highly contributes to sustaining the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia. The absence of assigning adequate resources for the implementation of the Revised Family Code is also caused by a high level of poverty in the country.

Furthermore, in the past three years, Ethiopia has been passing through hard times. Mainly, civil war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an unstable macro economy are the major challenges that are shaking Ethiopia. These challenges directly aggravate the level of poverty in the country. This high level of poverty sustains the practice of child marriage. One of our respondents from the Benishangul-Gumuz regional governments said:

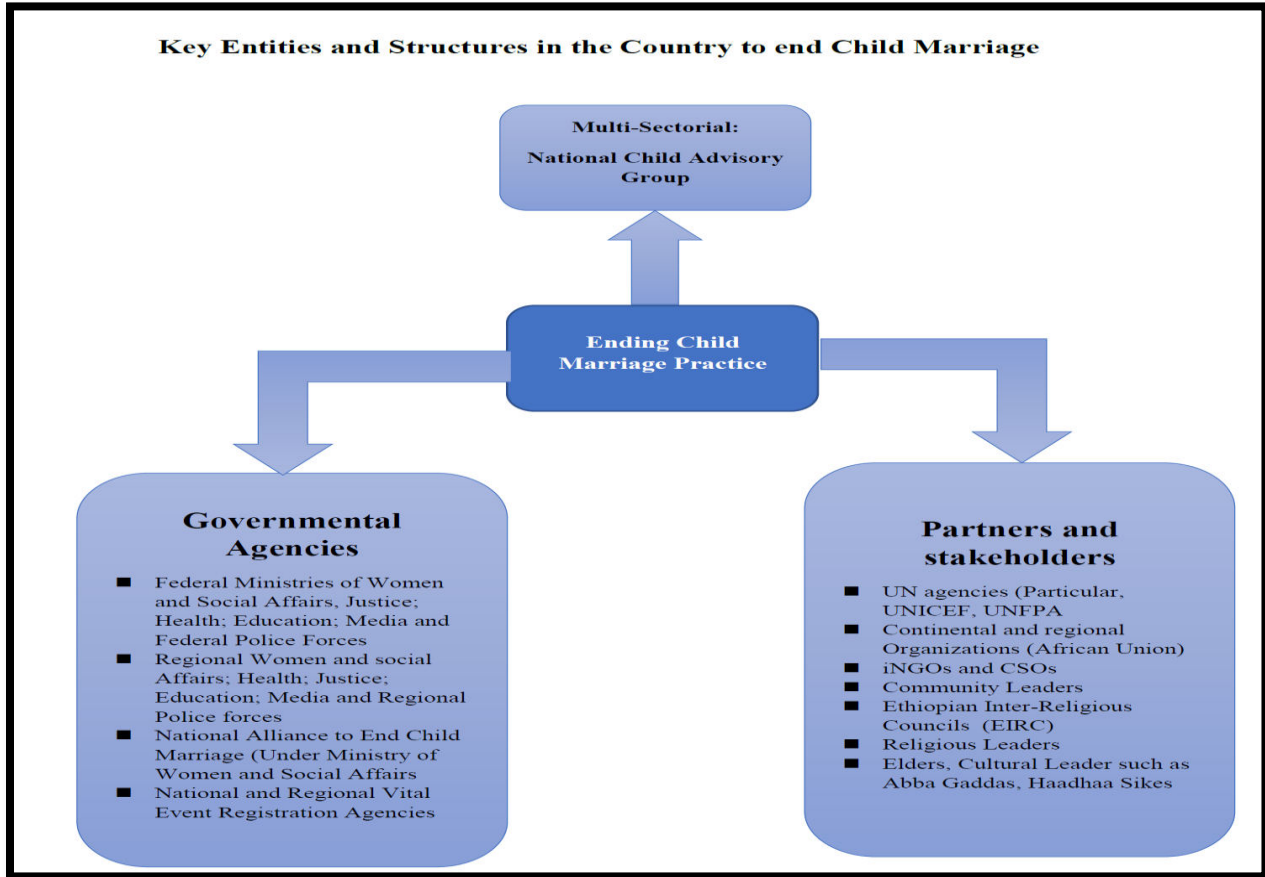
In the past few years, our country has been affected by civil war, a humanitarian crisis, and displacement. This problem is also common in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. Currently, most local bureaus are not actively working. All intervention programs have also suspended.

Generally, our respondents confirmed that a high level of poverty is also a cause of the ineffective implementation of the Revised Family Code in the country.

## **7. Tracing the implementation processes**

Once announced by the federal government, the Revised Family Code was not uniformly enforced in all regions and administrative cities of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a federal country that has ten regions and two city administrations. According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution, the federal and regional governments have their defined mandates. To implement all laws and regulations by the federal government, the lawmakers of the regional government need to approve them first. In 2000, the Revised Family Code was adopted immediately in Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa. The other regions, namely Afar, Benishangul, Gambela, Harari, SNNP of Ethiopia, and Somalia, were implementing the 1960 Family Code (Gajigo & Hallward, 2005). After 2005, two regions adopted the Revised Family Code: Gambela and SNNP of Ethiopia (Hombrados, 2017). Lastly, after 2011 all outstanding regions adopted the program.

**Figure 1: Key entities and structures in the country that help to end child marriage**



Source: Ministry of women and Youth Affairs (2021)

Figure 1 shows key implementing partners of the RFC: government, non-governmental and multi-sectorial implementing agencies. The goal of ending the practice of child marriage is a cross-cutting issue. Different institutions need to take part to achieve the goal. For effective enforcement of the policy, these partners need to actively communicate and work together.

### **7.1. Public awareness and advocacy campaigns on the Revised Family Code**

During the early stage of the adoption of the Revised Family Code, intensive awareness creation workshops, seminars, training, and community conversations have been conducted. As the Revised Family Code is a new issue for the community, most stakeholders intensively work to create awareness of the changed Family Code. The Revised Family Code clearly states the minimum legal age for marriage as well as different rights of children and women. Most stakeholders designed programs to enhance the awareness of their community on the legal minimum age for marriage as well as on the rights of children and women. The national Criminal

Code (2005) also states that any marriage concluded with a girl-child younger than 18 years is a crime and punishable by law. Lack of knowledge and awareness is the major factor in committing a crime. To enhance the awareness of the community about the Revised Family Code and Criminal Code, intensive awareness creation and advocacy programs were conducted throughout the country by different stakeholders. Different stakeholders designed programs on the Revised Family Code and the side effects of child marriage in the community. Our respondents from the Bureau of Justice of the Amhara regional state said:

Legal literacy is one of the intervention tools incorporated in our annual plans. There is a division in our office that gives different awareness creation interventions to the community. We believe that the awareness of the community significantly enhanced on the Revised Family Code and the side effect of child marriage.

### **7.2. Mainstreaming the Revised Family Code in different sectors' plans**

The second major activity accomplished for enforcing the Revised Family Code is mainstreaming the Revised Family Code and child marriage issues in different sectoral plans. Child marriage issues are cross-cutting. Different implementing stakeholders need to mainstream these in their annual plans for effective implementation. The key stakeholders for implementing the Revised Family Code are the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Media, Police Force, and National Vital Events Registrations Agencies. Thus, the second major process taken to effectively implement the RFC on the ground is advocating and influencing the sector offices to integrate the RFC and end the practice of child marriage in their annual plan. Our respondents from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs said:

One of the stepping stones to end the practice of child marriage is mainstreaming the Revised Family Code in different government and non-government agencies. It is impossible to end child marriage with only the effort exerted by the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs. It needs the contribution from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Media, Enforcement Bodies, and other stakeholders and partners. To end child marriage practice, our ministry encourages all concerned bodies to mainstream child marriage issues in their annual plans.

### **7.3. Child marriage prevention programs**

#### **■ National roadmap to end child marriage**

At the national level, the government designs a national roadmap to effectively enforce the Revised Family Code. The national roadmap depicts the package of intervention, delivery, expected result, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to end child marriage practices in Ethiopia. It also shares roles and responsibilities among different stakeholders for the effective implementation of the Revised Family Code. The national roadmap was developed by incorporating all stakeholders' comments and suggestions, to build a sense of ownership at the implementation stage. The main objective of the National Roadmap is to identify the major strategies, nature of interventions, and means of delivery that will be enforced to realize the national target of ending child marriage by 2025. Furthermore, it shows the government's effort to meet Sustainable Development Goal 5 target 5.3 which aims to eliminate all harmful traditional practices including child marriage, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. With this objective, the National Roadmap also identified different stakeholders and their roles and develop an accountability mechanism to end child marriage in the county.

#### **■ Establishing Women's Development Groups**

Women Development Groups are networks of neighbouring women with one Women Development Group having 30 households with one President and Vice President. The major objective of this structure is to empower women, and share and learn about their day-to-day experiences. To empower women economically, socially, and politically, creating a structured women's team is crucial. Throughout the country, Women Development Groups are created and actively working on children and women issues. The empowerment of women- and indeed, the promotion of sustainable growth in the country and across the globe requires breaking down barriers to accessing economic resources, increasing access to education, and keeping girls in school. In Ethiopia, with its very dynamic and young population, there is an opportunity to promote the empowerment of girls as a catalyst for positive change and prosperity. Our respondents from the Amhara region bureau of Women and Social Affairs said:

Our bureau empowers women by grouping them under the Women Development Group. This structure developed at the community level. One Women Development Group has 30 neighbouring households. Our office gives training for a trainer on life skill-building. The training includes how they practice modern agriculture, enhancing the culture of saving, the advantage of educating their children, and women's reproductive health and rights. A trained trainer will train the members of Women's development

groups. Women development groups have a meeting twice per month. The Bureau of Women and Social Affairs encourages and follow-up their bi-monthly meetings and also assigned a budget for tea and coffee during their meeting.

**Table 1: Women empowerment platform/ structure**

<b>Regions</b>	<b>Total number of Women Development Group</b>	<b>Total number of Women Change Army Groups</b>	<b>Number of women encompassed in the groups</b>
<b>Amhara Region</b>	128,395	641,975	3,209,875
<b>Oromia Region</b>	170,944	954,720	4,273,600
<b>SNNP Region</b>	92,757	477,554	2,318,925
<b>Dire Dawa</b>	1,586	9,516	47,580
<b>Harar Region</b>	308	1,932	9,660
<b>Somali Region</b>	2,820	14,100	70,500
<b>Sidama Region</b>	22,393	111,852	670,818
<b>Total</b>	419,203	2,211,649	10,600,958

Source: Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, (2021)

Note: One Women Development Group contains 25-30 members. One Women Change army group contains 3-7 members. Currently, there is no women development group and women change army group in Addis Ababa city administration. Because of the ongoing humanitarian crisis and war, I couldn't get updated data from Afar, Gambela, and Benishangul. Change army is a smaller group under the Women Development Group.

Table 2 shows the total number of Women Development Groups, Women's Change Army, and the total number of women encompassed in Women Development Group in seven regions and one city administration. In total, there are 419,203 Women Development Groups; 2,211,649 Women's Change Army, and 10,600,958 women incorporated in the Women's Development Group. The government gives different support to economically empower members of Women Development Groups. Some of the support given by the government are tractors, start-up capital/loans with low interest or no interest, different life skill-



building training (modern farming, commercial farming, artwork, pottery work), and others.

### ■ **Well-established Children's Parliament**

To equip children with knowledge and skill to challenge violence against them including child marriage, children's parliaments have been established in Ethiopia. The first children's parliament started operating in September 2006. The children's parliament has grown to become Ethiopia's centre of excellence for children's participation and engagement. The process of establishing children's parliaments was inspired by the children's parliament of Finland, i.e., the Tampere Children Parliament. This model parliament was successful in creating opportunities for Finnish Children and young people to raise their voices and ensure participation in a matter that directly has an impact on them. With the same objectives, there are children's parliaments throughout Ethiopia. In these parliaments, children practice how they could protect themselves from harmful traditional social norms including child marriage, how to report maladministration of children and other issues that directly affect them. The establishment of children's parliaments creates good opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts, and feeling so that they can influence children to struggle with harmful traditional practices such as child marriage in their community. Our respondents from West Hararghe Zone said:

We established a children's parliament at the local level. Each parliament has a president and vice-presidents. The presidents and vice-presidents of the local-level parliaments' will be members of children's parliaments at the Zone level. The woreda level children's parliament has 60-80 members. There are six standing committees in each parliament: Child Rights Protection standing committee, Social issues standing committee, Gender and Disciple standing committee, Culture, Tourism and Recreational standing committee, Environmental Protection standing committee, and Data Management and Capacity building standing committee.

### ■ **Establishing Child Rights Committees**

To effectively deliver child policy intervention to end child marriage, Child Rights Committees are established both at the national, regional, and local levels of administration. The child rights committees meet bi-weekly to discuss mechanisms that improve child rights protection. A Child Rights Committee is composed of representatives from the Administrative office, Bureau of Women and Social Affairs, Bureau of Education, Bureau of Health, Community Leaders, Children, and Civic Society Organizations (CSOs). Our respondents from the Addis Ababa city administration said:

To eradicate any type of harmful traditional social norms and practices, there is a national-level Child Rights Committee. A Child Rights Committee is also established at the local level. The major objective of this committee is to protect children from any form of discrimination and injuries. The Government of Ethiopia passed legislation to assign two percent of the annual sectoral budget for children's protection. Of these two percent, one percent will be used for child rights protection and the other one percent will be used for people with HIV/AIDS. This shows a strong commitment from the government side to protect children.

#### ■ **Establishing diverse girls' clubs**

Girls' clubs have become more known to empower and promote girls' well-being. Establishing girls' clubs has many advantages for young children such as being familiar with their natural, physical, and emotional change and learning the necessary knowledge and skills to challenge harmful traditional social norms and practices. Some of the clubs aimed to enhance girls' educational performance (In-school girls clubs); others aimed to give technical and vocational skills to girls who have dropped out of school or never attend girls to help them generate income (out-of-school girls clubs). In recent times, the Ethiopian government and different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have effectively used girls' clubs to empower women. For example in the Amhara region, Amhara Development Association Girls' Club Initiative, run different clubs under the lower administrative structure of the community. These clubs enhance the awareness of young children about the side effects of child marriage, harmful traditional social norms, and practices, and sexual and reproductive health. Most of the clubs are managed by trained teachers. These trained teachers manage different groups of girls that are expected to share skills and knowledge with other girls through their development initiative at the grassroots level. Our respondents from the West Gonder zone said:

We established in-School and out-of-school girls' clubs. In-school clubs were established to reach students that enrolled in school. Generally, the objectives of the clubs are to enhance awareness of girls on reproductive health, the advantage of education, the side effect of child marriage, facilitate conditions to help each other academically, follow up on students that are absent from school, and others. On the other hand, out-of-school clubs are established to reach out to girls that missed school attendance. Each out-of-school girls club has 15 neighbourhood members. Bureau of Women and Social Affairs supports these out-of-school clubs to economically empower them, discuss reproductive health, and the side effects of child marriage, and also provide credit without interest as start-up capital.

### **7.3. Justice for children**

#### **■ Specialized courts for girls and women**

To deliver quick justice, the development of specialized courts for girls and women is very important. With the necessary budget and resources, a specialized court for girls and women is more effective in enforcing laws and orders to end child marriages. Under the specialized courts for girls and women, judges are gender-sensitive, deal with only girls' and women's issues, and can deliver justice more quickly. The fact that the same judges manage cases of children and women, may help to take appropriate measures to deal with repeated offenders. It could significantly decrease violence against young children and women in the community. Our respondents from the Ministry of Justice said:

We encourage and facilitate the development of specialized courts for children and women all over the country. A special court has psychologists, social work specialists/professionals, health workers, CCTV installed special rooms for young children that would increase their comfort to talk freely, and other technology that would increase the confidence of young children to express their pain and feeling to the court. These experts encourage a girl child to express her feeling and her pain without fear. Furthermore, the girl child will not directly contact the judge and other audiences including offenders. The judge will follow the girl child's opinions and feelings through a CCTV camera. These cases would be handled by female judges.

#### **■ Closed courts for child marriage cases**

In the area where there is no special court for children and women cases, there are other alternatives such as child-friendly benches. To encourage girls to express themselves clearly, all child marriage cases are handled under closed courts. In principle, all courts should operate publicly but to enhance the confidence of children and women, child marriage cases are handled in closed courts. In addition to this, the judge will not wear a formal gown, the judge will not sit on stage rather she sits in the office in a friendly manner unless there is a shortage of female judges, most child marriage cases are handled by female judges. Our respondents from the Benishangul-Gumuz region said:

Our region is in the process of installing special courts for children and women with the help of UNICEF. In the meantime, we have closed court for children and women to freely express themselves before the court. In a closed court, the relationship between judges and victims is friendly. We try our best to encourage girls to express themselves and their feelings.

### **7.5. Securing international and regional support**

The child marriage problem is an agenda for all communities in the world. Different international and regional organizations support the practice of ending child marriage. Ethiopia is one of the African countries that secured international and regional support to end child marriage. For example, Ethiopia is one out of 12 countries supported by UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, Accelerating Change. At the regional level, Ethiopia is getting technical and financial support from the Africa Union's (AU) Campaign to End Child Marriages. Ethiopia has also hosted different regional and international summits to end the practice of child marriage by 2025. For example, in 2015 a National Girl Summit was hosted by the Ethiopian Government to reassure its commitment to end the practice of child marriage, including assigning necessary financial, human, and technical resources.

### **7.5. Life skills building**

Using different platforms and structures, the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs works for the empowerment of women. One approach that improves women's empowerment is to assist them to learn life skills. For example, our respondents from West Hararghe said:

Using Women Development Group, we facilitate for girls to learn new knowledge and skills that help them to earn for life. During previous times, women who dropped out-of-School had no other alternative except marriage. Poverty enforce girls to accept early marriage in their life. Getting exposure through Out-of-School clubs, Women Development Group, and Change Army arrangement facilitates the delivery of programs and interventions designed at the federal level to a regional level.

The Federal government designed different skill-building interventions like offering training on how to farm, how to herd livestock, modern beekeeping, handcrafted designs and artwork, and others. As children and women participate in Clubs, Women's Development Groups, and or Change Army groups, their confidence to talk about reproductive health, life skill, and natural change in girl-children enhanced. Participation in these structures and platforms also enhances the chance for young child brides to have friends and family members to talk with.

## **8. Results**

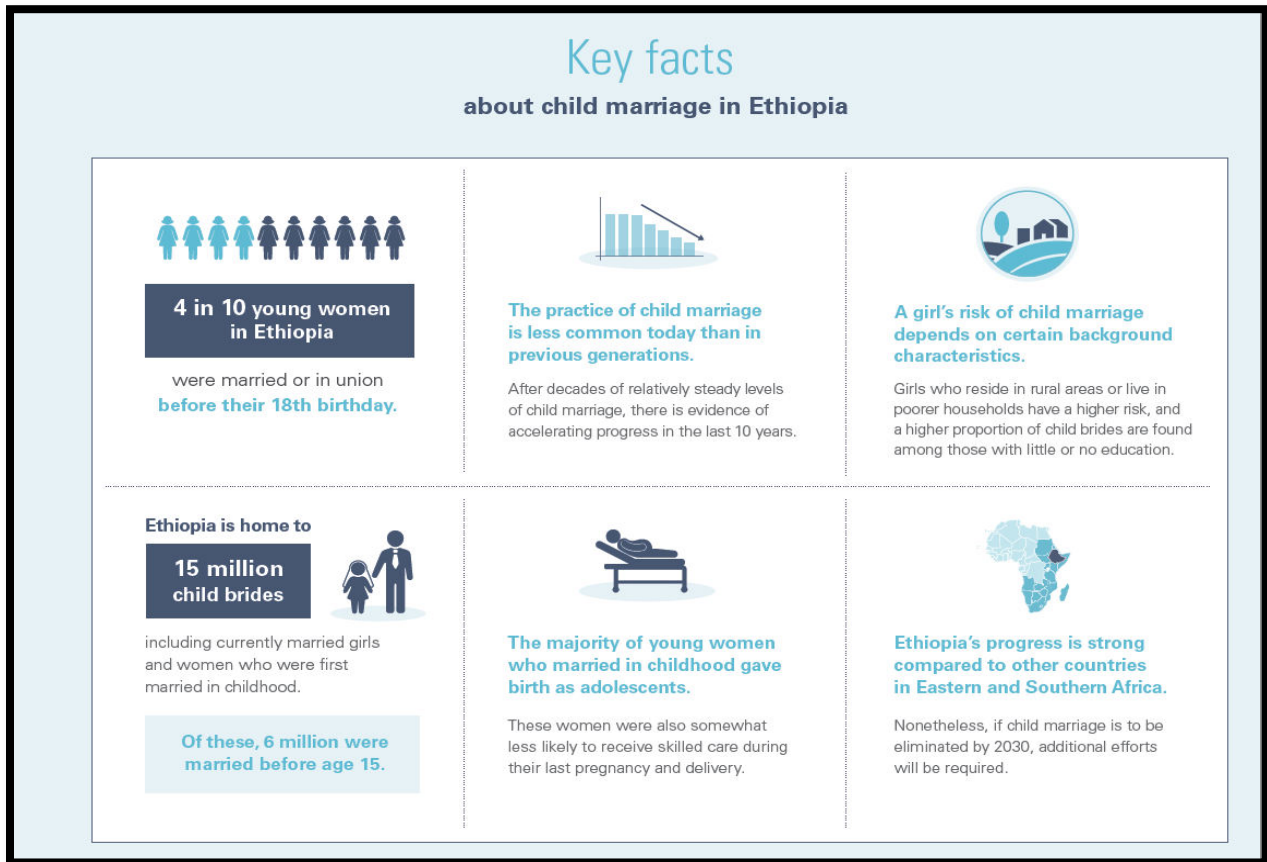
### **8.1. Enhanced public awareness**

#### **■ Child marriage is a crime**

The Revised Family Code extended the minimum legal age of marriage to 18. Any marriage concluded with a minor would be dissolved by the court. Article 648 of the Criminal Code states that any marriage with a minor is a crime and punishable. The punishment for child marriage range from 3 to 7 years. The punishment is not only on the husband but also on all guests who attend the ceremony including both spouses' families. The Revised Family Code and Criminal Code clearly state that the practice of child marriage is a crime. The majority of the Ethiopian community has full awareness that the practice of child marriage is a crime. Before the revision of the Ethiopian 1960s Family Code, practicing child marriage was considered a reputation for the family and a blessing for the girl child. These days, practicing child marriage is very rare and if it is practiced, it will not be public. There are some new techniques that communities use to hide the issue from the law officer. For example, they may invite guests for a birthday celebration or some other local program but would indirectly be celebrating the wedding of a minor. Only a few family members know as it is a wedding program. Generally, the community knows that child marriage is a crime. Our respondents from Amhara Region said:

There is no problem of awareness in the community about the illegality of child marriage. Everybody knows that marriage before the minimum legal age at marriage is illegal. Nowadays, communities have developed a new mechanism to hide the practice of child marriage: They invite people for a birthday celebration but indirectly they are celebrating the marriage of their minor child.

**Figure 2: The key facts about child marriage issues in Ethiopia.**



Source: UNICEF (2021), Ethiopia

■ **Educating a woman is educating a nation**

Women are half of the total population of the country. Undermining women is about undermining the macro economy of the nation at large. Women are well-known for their long-term plans such as investing in capacity building/education of their offspring, health, and other high turnover investments. Policy and decision-makers use girls' education as a key tool to sustain economic growth in the country. Our respondents revealed that significant progress has been made in girls' school enrolment, drop-out, and completion rate. Mostly, the ratio of school enrolment becomes a one-to-one ratio in primary and secondary schools. Because of continuous awareness creation and advocacy interventions, school drop-out also decreased meaningfully.



**Table 2: Dropout rates in schools in Ethiopia**

<b>Dropout Rate</b>						
<b>Education cycles</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Dropout rate in Primary Education	2.20%	2.16%	2.67%	3.8%	2.98%	2.11%
Dropout rate 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle (grade 1-4)	1.80%	1.92%	1.39%	1.8%	1.47%	1.10%
Dropout rate 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle (grade 5-8)	1.43%	1.41%	1.28%	2%	1.51%	1.01%
Secondary Education Dropout rate (Grade 9)				2.57%	2.21%	1.88%
Preparatory (Grade 11)				1.86%	1.61%	1.37%

Source: Ministry of Education: Education sector statistical abstract (2018)

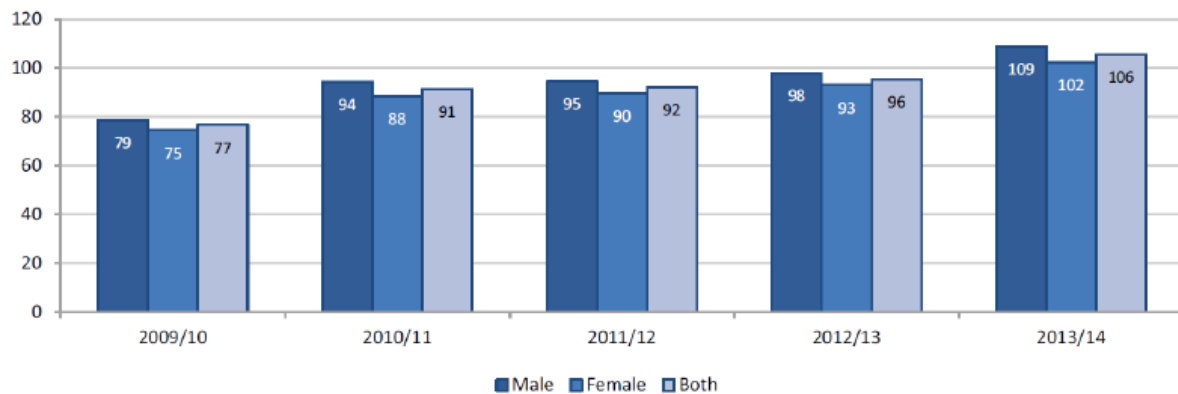
Table 2 shows the percentage of drop-out rate across time in different education cycles in Addis Ababa city administration. The primary education drop-out rate declined from 2.2 in 2012 to 2.1 percent in 2017 and the secondary education drop-out rate declined from 2.6 percent in 2015 to 1.9 percent in 2017 in Addis Ababa city administration.

The primary and secondary school completion rates are also increasing continuously in the country. Our respondents from the Gurgaha Zone said:

Nowadays our community fully understands the advantage of girls' education. Empowering girls help their daughter to live the good life in the future. Previously the community was highly influenced by public beliefs such as educating girls is valueless since she will leave her parents' house upon marriage; Women could not advance in education and many other traditions and social norms discouraged girls' school attendance. But after the implementation of the Revised Family Code, the influence of these social norms significantly declined. Those people that believe in social norms that discourage girls' education are considered illiterate and backward people. The insult and discrimination backfire on themselves. Rather, nowadays, communities' common slogan to promote girls' education is 'educating a woman is educating a nation'.

Ethiopia shows significant progress in girls' school enrolment and completion. The net primary enrolment rate has gone up from 80.5 percent in 2010 to 84.1 percent in 2013. Good progress has been also achieved in primary education completion. According to a report from the Ministry of Education in 2013, the grade 8 completion rate increased from 44.5 percent to 52.2 percent between 2010 and 2013. Even if secondary gross enrolment is less for girls than boys, it is continuously increasing. For example, between 2009 and 2013, the secondary school enrolment rate increased from 34.7 to 36.9 percent.

**Figure 3: Net enrolment ratio in Grade 1, by gender, 2013/2014 (%)**



Source: Ministry of Education: Education sector statistical abstract (2018)

■ **Change of social norms on child marriage**

In Ethiopia, most social norms and traditions force girls to work at home on unpaid jobs, restrict their time for education, and make them lose job opportunities. These social norms and traditions also forbid the movement of girls outside the home and limit the chance to contact friends and families. The same social norms and traditions sustain the practice of child marriage. Before the adoption of the Revised Family Code, being married before 15 years was an indicator of family wealth and family reputation in the community. After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, these social norms and traditions continuously changed. Most of our respondents confirmed that the majority of the families know the side effect of child marriage. The majority of the family members have a vision of educating their girl child, enabling them to become economically independent and get married when mentally, physically, and economically ready to manage her marriage. Our respondents from the Gambela regions said:

After the implementation of the Revised Family Code (2000) and effective enforcement of the Revised Criminal Code (2005), harmful traditional social norms and traditions significantly declined. The community's belief and attitude towards child marriage significantly changed. Recently, our community believes in educating their daughters and enabling them to be economically empowered before marriage.

■ **Changes in the attitudes of the community and religious leaders**

All concerned public sectors (health, education, justice, and others) implemented advocacy and monitoring interventions at the community level using different platforms and structures such as Women Development Groups, in- and out-of-school clubs, and others. These lower-level platforms and structures consist of representatives from different community members such as women, youths, elders, religious leaders, community leaders, and experts from local administrations. Our respondents from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs said:

*The advocacy and monitoring intervention 2017 campaign on legal literacy, health, and women's rights, has shown significant results in ending child marriage practices. The women's rights perspective of the campaign has shown progress on gender roles, developing interest, and making the dialogue about other harmful traditional social norms and practices such as abduction. To sustain the hopeful cooperation in the community, The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs has been taking different measures such as preparing manuals on social norms to change the community dialogue forum and encouraging male participation in the process of change.*

Religious and tribal leaders play an important role in changing social norms and practices that sustain child marriage in the country. In Ethiopia, religious leaders play a significant role in supporting interventions aimed at eliminating traditional social norms and practices, ensuring that those practices will be reported to officials, and more importantly giving a blessing to field workers such as health workers, police officers, social workers, and others. This blessing encourages the community to cooperate with these public officers. At the national level, the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) has been established to eliminate harmful traditional social norms and practices since 2010. IRCE is composed of seven faith-based organizations. To achieve its objectives, IRCE has arranged different forums for community dialogue, prepare strategies through active participation of all members, and plans to end child marriage by 2025. Our respondents from the Amhara region said:

*Religious leaders, preachers, community leaders, and elders highly support interventions designed to end child marriage. They actively participate in the delivery of the intervention to the targets population. Most religious leaders allow short awareness creation programs at religious centres (Churches, Mosques, and others) commonly on Sundays.*

## **8.2. Better enforcement of laws and quick Justice for Children**

By utilizing the established girls and women empowerment platform in 2020 about 3,749 planned child marriages were identified. Out of the identified planned child marriage practices, fifty-five percent were cancelled following the effective push and coordination between legal enforcement bodies and community-level women empowerment platforms. Relative to 2019, the total reported child marriage arrangements in 2020 were much less. For example in 2019, about 4,991 cases of planned child marriages were identified with thirty-seven percent voided through the effective cooperation between the legal enforcement bodies and community level women empowerment platforms (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ethiopian government closed schools from March 16, 2020, to November 2020. Thus, during this period in-school girl empowerment platforms such as in-school girls clubs were out of service. Although in-school girl clubs were inactive, many child marriage practices were, however, voided through the help of the community level girls and women empowerment platforms which include the out-of-school girls' clubs, Women Development Groups, Women Change Army Groups, and anonymous suggestion boxes in the communities (ibid). The continuous reporting of the planned child marriage acts during the COVID-19 pandemic shows the effective operation of girls' and women's empowerment platforms in the community. These girls and women's empowerment platforms boost the confidence of girls to report and seek support from concerned bodies (ibid).

According to the report from UNFPA-UNICEF (2020) pre-COVID-19 pandemic, schools, and girls empowerment groups, enabled the identification of more than eighty percent of planned child marriages in the community. The increased functionality of community-level girls and women empowerment platforms helped in identifying the planned child marriage practice, providing technical and material support for girls, and distributing educational materials assist to fill the gaps that were created by the pandemic. Different government institutions such as the Bureau of Women, Children, and Youth, Bureau of Health, Bureau of Education, and Bureau of Justice support community-level women empowerment platforms and extend assistance to them through house-to-house visits.

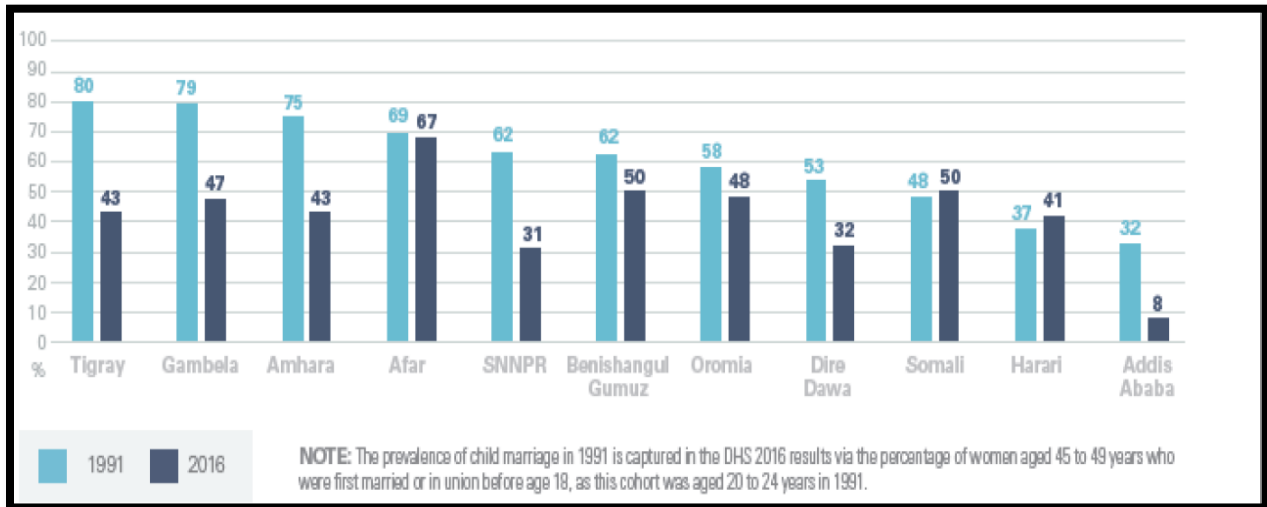
**8.3. Sectorial plans modified to incorporate the goal of ending child marriage**

Once the awareness of the community is enhanced, incorporating the child issue in the sectoral annual plan is very necessary for the prevention, protection, and response to child marriage. All necessary sectors (like education, health, justice, police, and other sectors) incorporated a plan for ending child marriage practice in Ethiopia. Under the ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the National Alliance to End Child Marriage was established. The alliance aimed to effectively coordinate enforcement of National Strategies and Action plan on harmful social norms that sustain the practice of early marriage.

**8.4. The decline in the child marriage practices**

After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, child marriage has shown a significant decline. The community understands the consequences of child marriages ranging from early motherhood, school drop-out, maternal death, intergenerational poverty, and loss of opportunity for the formal labour market (Koski, 2017 and Rasmussen *et al.*, 2019). But after the adoption of the Revised Family Code, child marriage practice is continuously declining. The following bar graph shows the variation of the decline of child marriage practice in the regional government of Ethiopia. Some regions – Tigray, Amhara, South Nation, Nationalities, and People of Ethiopia- are performing better than others.

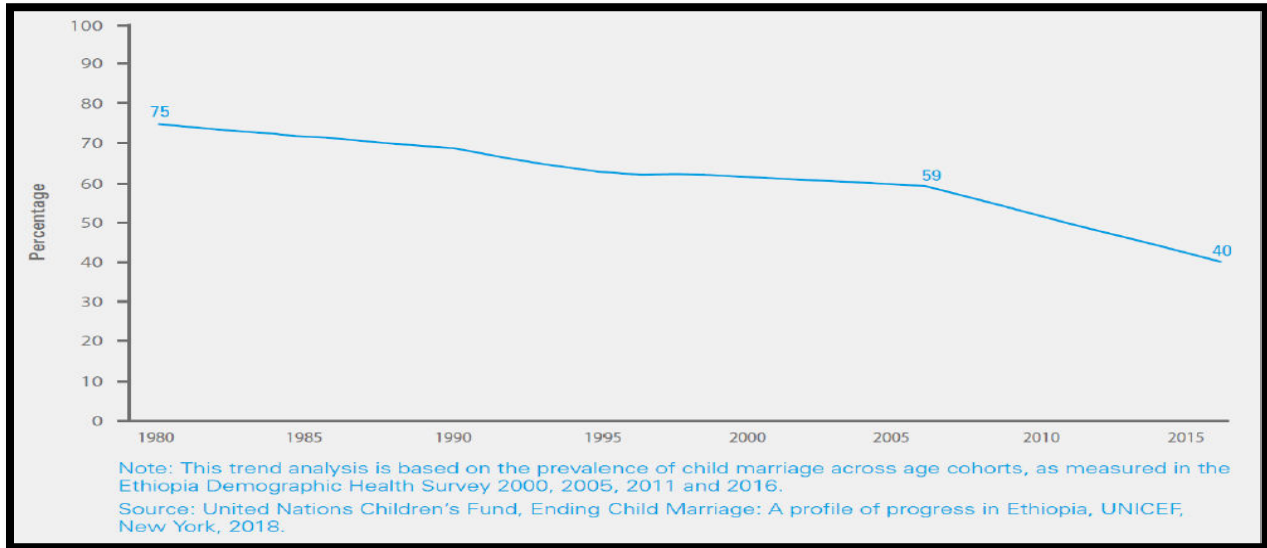
**Figure 4: Incidence of child marriage across regional government**



Source: UNICEF (2021), Ethiopia

Figure 4 shows the continued decline of early marriage practice in Ethiopia. Even if the incidence of early marriage is high in Ethiopia, it is declining at an increasing rate. For example, in the Tigray region, the incidence of early marriage dropped from 80 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2016 and in Addis Ababa city administration, dropped from 32 percent in 1991 to 8 percent in 2016. But in the Afar and Somali regional state still the incidence of early marriage is high.

**Figure 5: Incidence of child marriage among women aged 20-24**



Source: UNICEF (2021), Ethiopia

Figure 5 shows the incidence of early marriage for women aged 20-24. The incidence of early marriage for women aged 20-24 who were married before 18, dropped from 80 percent 1980 to 40 percent in 2016.

**8.5. Further consequences**

■ **Narrowed gender disparity in education**

Ethiopia’s formal education system is now organized according to the primary cycle (Grade 1-6), lower secondary (Grade 7-8), and high school (9-12). The Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 5) is aimed at decreasing gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations by 2030. After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, many gender disparities in primary and secondary education significantly declined in Ethiopia. Our respondents from Dire Dawa city administration said:

*After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, the school enrolment rate is significantly increasing. There is an equal proportion of males and females in primary school. Even in some woredas, more female students than male students are enrolled. In secondary schools, there are relatively more males than females. Our respondents revealed the existence of significant gender disparity at tertiary level education and recommended for the government facilitate affirmative action for females to join tertiary education.*

According to the Educational annual statistical abstract from the Ministry of Education, gender parity at different cycles of the education system shows significant improvement. As shown in Table 2 below, the gender parity ratio at all



cycles of education are significantly increasing. This is because of the different interventions delivered to end the practice of child marriage in the community. As the number of young children who married before the legal age of marriage declines, the chance for the girl child to stay and complete her education will increase. Thus, the parity index in education significantly improved because of these reasons.

**Table 3: Trend of gender parity ratio in education in Ethiopia**

<b>Gender Parity Ratio in Ethiopia</b>		
Education Cycles	2009-2010	2012-2013
Primary (1-4)	0.90	0.92
Primary (5-8)	0.96	0.98
Secondary (9-10)	0.80	0.92
Preparatory (11-12)	0.56	0.81

Source: Ministry of Education, Education annual statistical abstract (2018), Ethiopia

As shown in the above table, the gender parity in each cycle of the education system is continuously improving. In all cycles, gender parity has changed positively.

**Table 4: Percentage of female students in Addis Ababa city administration**

<b>Percentage of Female Students</b>						
Cycle of Education	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Pre-primary education	48.9	50.6	49.1	49.2	48.8	49.2
Primary education	54.8	54.8	52.2	54.3	54.8	54.3
First cycle (Grade 1-4)	54.1	56.6	56.7	54.0	54.3	53.8
Second cycle (Grade 5-8)	52.1	56.9	56.3	54.6	55.3	54.8
Secondary education 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle (grade 9-10)	52.1	37.9	49.2	55.1	55.1	55.3
Preparatory 2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle (11-12)	54.9	54.9	56.9	56.9	55.6	55.8

Source: Ministry of Education, Education annual statistical abstract (2018), Ethiopia

The above table shows the percentage share of female students in Addis Ababa city administration at different cycles of education. Except in the pre-primary education cycle, in all other cycles of education, the percentage share of female students is more than fifty percent. This shows that in Addis Ababa city administration more female students are attending school than male students.

■ **Work in paid job**

Before the adoption of the RFC, most women did not participate in the formal labour market. They limit their capacity only to domestic work. After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, a significant change has been achieved in women's educational enrolment and attainment, and labour force participation. For example, in 2016, the female employment rate increased to 71 percent from 64 in 2000. Of course, still, women's employment rate is less than the male employment rate (85 percent in 2016 for males) (MoE, 2018). Our respondent from the Gambela region said:

*The chance of women getting formal labor is increasing after the adoption of the Revised Family Code in Ethiopia. The number of women employees in our staff could be used as a sample. There are many female public servants in our sectors. Women are empowered in their works as well as in the decision-making process in our regions. At the national level, there is a direction of incorporating women in the decision-making process. 47 percent of the national cabinet are women. Using the same direction at the regional level the number of women decision-makers significantly increased at all levels of public administration.*

According to a report from IDRC (2020), Ethiopia achieved significant progress on women's political empowerment after selecting women presidents and giving most of the cabinet positions to women. Ethiopia had been ranked 16 globally on women's political empowerment.

■ **Summary of the interconnection among delivery challenges, processes, and results**

Table 5 shows the interconnection among delivery challenges that hinder effective implementation of the RFC, the innovation introduced to overcome the challenges, and the results achieved in the process of implementation.

**Table 5: Summary of the interconnection among delivery challenges, processes, and results**

<b>Delivery challenges</b>	<b>Tracing the implementation processes</b>	<b>the Results</b>
<b>Social norms and cultural challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Intensive awareness campaign</li> <li>■ Intensive legal literacy campaign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Change of social norms on child marriage</li> <li>■ Child marriage is a crime</li> <li>■ Educating a woman is educating a nation</li> <li>■ Changes in the</li> </ul>

		<p>attitudes of the community and religious leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Declined in the child marriage practice</li> </ul>
<b>Coordination and engagement challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mainstreaming the RFC in different sectors' plans</li> <li>■ National roadmap to end child marriage</li> <li>■ Securing international and regional support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sectorial plans modified to incorporate the goal of ending child marriage</li> <li>■ Declined in the child marriage practice</li> </ul>
<b>Legislation and regulation challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Specialized courts for girls and women</li> <li>■ Closed courts for child marriage cases</li> <li>■ Establishing child rights committees</li> <li>■ Well-established children's parliaments (children's centre of excellence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better enforcement of laws</li> <li>■ Quick justice for children</li> <li>■ Declined in the child marriage practice</li> </ul>
<b>Limited access to the media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Establishing diverse girls' clubs (In-and-out-of-school girls' clubs)</li> <li>■ Establishing women's development and changing army groups</li> <li>■ Well-established children's parliaments (children's centre of excellence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changes in attitudes of the community and religious leaders</li> <li>■ Change of social norms on child marriage</li> <li>■ Declined in the child marriage practice</li> </ul>
<b>Underdevelopment and poverty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide life skills building training</li> <li>■ Establishing women's development groups and changing army groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased probability to join the formal labour market</li> <li>■ Narrowed gender disparity in education</li> <li>■ Declined in the child</li> </ul>

	<p>■ Securing international and regional support</p>	<p>marriage practice</p>
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Source: summarized by author

## 9. Discussion

The majority of the Ethiopian community has full awareness that the practice of child marriage is a crime. Before the adoption of the RFC, practicing child marriage was considered a reputation for family and a blessing for the girl-child. Thus, in Ethiopia no one celebrate child marriage practice publically. In support of our finding Dennyet *al.*, (2015) revealed that parents conclude early marriage by not referring to the ceremony as a wedding. In Ethiopia policy and decision-makers use girls' education as a key tool to sustain the economic growth of the nation. Our respondents revealed that significant progress has been made in girls' school enrolment and completion rate. In support of this study Schultz (2002), Karumbi *et al.*, (2017), and United Nations (2015) listed the benefits of girls education such as end early marriage, reduce unwanted pregnancy and young pregnancy, intimate, maternal and infant mortality, and ensure sustainable development of a nation. Abuya *et al.*, (2017) through a qualitative study showed that parents' engagement in school meetings changes the value of girls' education. On the other hand, Global Partnership for Education (2016) report shows that the existence of social norms and tradition influence families to give low value to girls' education.

In Ethiopia, most social norms and traditions force girls to work at home on unpaid jobs, restrict their time for education, and make them lose job opportunities. These social norms and traditions also forbid the movement of girls outside the home and limit the chance to contact friends and families. After the adoption of the RFC, these social norms and traditions meaningfully declined. The majority of my observations have a vision of educating their girl-child, enabling them to become economically independent and to get married when mentally, physically, and economically ready to manage her marriage. In support of this finding Sunstein (1996) and McAdams (2000) argue that even if the legislation is not enforced effectively, it has an "expressive effect" which impacts attitudes, norms, behaviours, values, and traditions. Chen and Yeh (2014) revealed that simply delivering a message about formal law affects social norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in the United States of America. On contrary, real-world experiences suggest that it might be very difficult, if not impossible, to overcome the steep barriers presented by entrenched social norms (Shakya *et al.*, 2014; UNICEF, 2020).

The study shows that through continuous awareness creation and advocacy campaigns, community and religious leaders' attitudes towards ending the practice of child marriage are changed. Since community and religious leaders are highly respected in the community, they have a great role in the successful delivery of the intervention to end child marriage. In support of this finding Nathani *et al.*, (2009) and Assad *et al.*,(2007) revealed that longer exposure to policy interventions changes the attitude of community and religious leaders towards the support of interventions that aimed to end the practice of child marriage. On contrary, Vaughan *et al.*, (2000) reported the absence of a significant impact of exposure to the Apwe Plezi program on attitudes toward women working in paid jobs.

After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, child marriage has shown a significant decline. The community understands the consequence of child marriage ranging from early motherhood, school drop-out, maternal death, intergenerational poverty, and loss of opportunity for the formal labour market (Koski, 2017 and Rasmussen *et al.*, 2019). Thus, according to Ethiopia's DHS data the prevalence of child marriage declined from 60 percent in 2005 to 40 percent in 2016. In support of this finding Amin (2017) shows that accessible education opportunities significantly decrease the prevalence of child marriage. Assad *et al.*, (2007) showed that with the longer exposure to the Ishraq (in Egypt) program that aimed to end the practice of child marriage, the preference for marrying before the legal age of marriage declined from 28 percent to 1 percent among observations that attended the program relative to the observations in the control group. On the contrary, Koski (2016); Malkotra *et al.* (2011) and Kidman and Heymann (2016) revealed an insignificant impact of legislative policy intervention on child marriage practice.

After the implementation of the RFC, women's educational attainment significantly improved. In Ethiopia, the gender parity ratio for education significantly increased at all levels of the education cycle. In Addis Ababa city administration more female students are attending school than male students. In support of this finding Chege *et al.* (2001) and Diop (2004) showed that policy intervention that aimed to end child marriage significantly increased women's educational attainment in Kenya and Senegal, respectively. Alim (2011) evaluates the impact of community dialogue on gender-egalitarian norms in Bangladesh. The finding of the study showed that the intervention significantly increased girls' school enrolment rate. Contrary to this study, Papaet *et al.*, (2004) on Taru in India; pureet *et al.*, (2002) on ReproSalud in Peru; Lowet *et al.*, (2012) on IPA in Zambia; Assad *et al.*, (2007) on Ishraq in Egypt found an insignificant impact of policy intervention towards gender-egalitarian norms on education. Fenn *et al.* (2015) revealed the existence high gender gap in education in sub-Saharan African countries.

After the adoption of the Revised Family Code, a significant change has been achieved in women's labour force participation. For example, in 2016, the female employment rate increased to 71 percent from 64 in 2000. Of course, still, women's employment rate is less than the male employment rate (85 percent in 2016 for males) (MoWSA, 2019). In support of our finding ElNagar *et al.* (2017) revealed that girls who marry before the legal age of marriage are disadvantaged due to the lack of different socio-economic opportunities including the opportunity to join the formal labour force to earn sufficient income for their basic needs. Scholars argued that in countries with high early marriage occurrences, there is either ineffective implementation or an absence of laws and regulations that could protect children from early marriage (Mathur *et al.*, 2003; Myers, 2013; Backlund & Blomqvist, 2014).

Generally, the findings of this study show the positive impact of adopting the Revised Family Code on the short and long-run women's life outcome. Though many developing countries have policies and strategies to protect girls from early marriage, putting it down in black and white, however, cannot practically overcome the problem of early marriage. There is a problem with effective implementation and evaluation (ICRW, 2011; Myer, 2013). Since the early 1990s, India set 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage (UNICEF, 2015). In Nigeria, the adoption of the minimum legal age for marriage has no implications for early marriage (Toyo, 2006). Nour (2009) revealed that lack of basic needs, opportunities for education, and formal employment are the causes and consequences of early marriage in many developing countries.

## **10. Lessons learned**

From this study, the author noticed that creating an enabling environment for effective delivery of interventions designed to end child marriage is an important strategy for eliminating harmful traditional social norms and practices. From this perspective, the Ethiopian government shows a strong pledge to end child marriage by 2025. For example, the government has a clear-cutting point for the minimum legal age of marriage, 18, and criminalizes child marriage in the Revised Criminal Code (2005). Some different interventions structures and platforms enable to reach local children's and women's-Women Development Group, In-School and Out-of-School Clubs, Child Right Committee, Change Army, and others- from the federal to the regional level which facilitates effective implementation of various policy interventions. These platforms and structures are actively supported by the community, religious leaders, and community leaders which facilitate effective engagement at the community level.



The other major lesson noticed from this study is the role of key community members like religious institutions, religious leaders, elders, and media organizations since they are key factors for achieving intended objectives. These key stakeholders have direct contact with different members of families, communities, and particularly with girls at risk. These key community members determine the success of the intervention because they are respected by the community members. Both at the federal and local levels of the country, some structures and platforms encourage communication and cooperation among these community members. These enabling factors help them to play an essential role in changing social norms and practices.

After the implementation of the Revised Family Code, school enrolment rates are continuously increasing. Nowadays, many children are attending primary and secondary school. Thus, to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to challenge harmful social norms and practices, developing school-based clubs is very important. In Ethiopia, there are many school-based clubs. One of the strengths of school-based clubs is that, for all girls to attend clubs programs, they do not need to get permission from their parents. To increase members of In-School clubs, teachers convince the community about the importance of enrolling girls in clubs. Furthermore trained teachers advocate for the establishment of out-of-school clubs to reach children who are not in school. These out-of-school clubs and different empowerment programs are basic strategic tools for policy and decision-makers to reach out to out-of-school girls (already married or have children). Selecting the suitable time and frequency of contacting these out-of-school girls is also important to reach all girls. Convincing their parents is also another determining factor for achieving the intended goals. To enhance the effectiveness of in and out-of-school clubs, creating opportunities for different family members including boys to enrol in the clubs is essential.

Many of the community and women's development structures established at different levels of administration highly depend on external funding. It is expected that this framework needs to work sustainably to reach different generations. Because of a lack of budget and experienced human resources, most of the initiatives and development structures are not sustainably working. Authors noticed that all girls' empowerment programs and initiatives should look at mechanisms that could help them to generate an annual budget sustainably for a longer-term. The facilitators of the programs and initiatives also need to update themselves with new ideas and technology.

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