Child marriage context

There are 17.3 million child brides in Ethiopia, 7.5 million of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 40 per cent which is a 30 per cent reduction since 1991: giving evidence to that even in countries where the prevalence of child marriage is high, progress is possible.\(^{20}\) However, in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030 progress would have to be greatly accelerated from where it is now. If it the rates of reduction remain as they are the prevalence will be 9 per cent by 2050 and if doubled the prevalence will reach 2 percent by 2050.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.\(^{22}\) The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.\(^{21}\)


COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace,

TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Furthermore, in Ethiopia, the ongoing conflict in the northern part of the country has impacted programme implementation, with the Tigray region, all targeted woredas (districts) in the Afar region and six out of 16 woredas in the Amhara region being affected by the conflict, which meant that these areas were inaccessible for over three months during the year, leading to disruptions in community activities and school closures due to a declaration of a state of emergency at federal and regional levels. The knock-on effect was that child marriage interventions were deprioritized in favour of attempts at maintaining peace and security. The country was also affected by an ongoing drought, making families more vulnerable.

Key highlights

- The child marriage programme is a flagship programme for both UNFPA and UNICEF in Ethiopia, benefitting significantly from the coordination and accountability of multiple sectors and the leveraging of support from various counterparts among government and non-governmental partners for the common target of ending child marriage by 2025.

- 49,449 adolescent girls and 6,366 adolescent boys benefited from life skills training, sexual and reproductive health information and comprehensive sexuality education. Among the adolescent girls empowered, 170 are living with disabilities.

- 7,413 adolescent girls received support to continue their education despite the repeated school closures due to the ongoing conflict in some areas of the country.

- Half a million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- Over one million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were reached by mass and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- 22,497 religious and other community leaders were mobilized to champion change towards ending child marriage.

- Close to 1,622 women development groups and youth groups were mobilized to conduct community surveillance to identify child marriage arrangements, negotiate with families and provide referrals for adolescent girls to protection and care services. 16,003 child marriage arrangement cases were identified and reported by anti-harmful traditional practices committees and community surveillance mechanisms during the year.

- Government and non-governmental actors increased funding to implement the roadmap for the elimination of harmful practices (2020-2024) based on the expenditure tracking exercise that was supported by the Global Programme in 2020.

- In 2021, the Ethiopia country office implemented the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool together with government and civil society partners to review and reflect on gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage. This three-day process resulted in concrete actions to support pathways for power shifts and gender equality to be implemented from 2022 onwards.

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Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111:</strong> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>105,772</td>
<td>49,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>7,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>32,968</td>
<td>41,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality</td>
<td>540,267</td>
<td>504,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality</td>
<td>13,000,000</td>
<td>1,026,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>1,322</td>
<td>22,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231:</strong> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121:</strong> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131:</strong> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211:</strong> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111:</strong> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221:</strong> Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

To prevent, respond to and meet the needs of adolescent girls during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the conflict in the northern part of the country, UNICEF contracted VIAMO and adapted the use of interactive voice recording (IVR) (over telephone) and radio programmes. This was done to provide training and facilitate learning sessions on life skills, awareness-raising about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and other available services to enhance the resilience of girls at risk and survivors of child marriage, so as to ensure continuity even in these challenging contexts. As a result, the Global Programme managed to reach 49,977 adolescent girls through transformative life skills and SRHR sessions and comprehensive sexuality education. Girls are increasingly influencing decisions on marriage by seeking legal services to end marriage arrangements which are against the law and that violate their rights. During the reporting period, 2,051 child marriages were cancelled as a result of girls running away and seeking support from child protection services.

In addition, the Global Programme is leveraging humanitarian response programmes by integrating messaging on child marriage in ongoing initiatives and testing the delivery of life skills sessions using radio, supplemented with structured listener groups for those who regularly interact in the exchange of lessons from the sessions.

The programme also specifically targets vulnerable areas and populations affected by the humanitarian context. For example, in the Gambella region, the organization Norwegian Church Aid strengthened four safe spaces during the year in the Jewi refugee camp and in Gambella town

An innovative approach: Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) in collaboration with VIAMO

COVID-19 challenged the regular way of implementing some activities, yet it allowed the programme to explore new ways of working despite challenging humanitarian contexts. One of the innovative approaches adopted was the use of telephones in providing training for girls, through interactive voice recording (IVR). This approach has shown huge potential in reaching adolescent girls and in customizing life skills training sessions and community conversations.

The approach was tested in two regions during the year, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ (SNNP) and Amhara. In SNNP, 195 adolescent girls participated and completed the training over four months, which covered 16 topics. In addition, refresher training was provided to 143 community conversation facilitators using IVR. Both target groups (girls and facilitators) benefited from the training and noted that the platform was user-friendly as they could follow and listen to the sessions when it was convenient during their own time. It also does not require them to move outside of their villages or homes. Training provided using IVR employs an interactive approach by engaging girls through question and answer methodologies as part of each session and gathering feedback on the sessions.

Based on the learning sessions, efforts were initiated to scale up the girls’ empowerment component across seven targeted regions in 2022, reaching 4,500 girls. To increase the level of exposure and access to the content, all content developed will be shared on additional platforms such as school-based mini-media channels and social media platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp. Going forward, the approach will also be combined with face-to-face reviews and exchange sessions and various follow-up mechanisms to track progress among the targeted girls, in addition to planned midline and endline surveys.

Of note is that one of the limitations of the IVR approach is that only those who have their own mobile phone or have access to a phone through a family member can access the training opportunities.
ETHIOPIA

schools, organizing peer education and providing information around SRHR for unmarried and married girls. Further, gender clubs led by adolescent girls reached 815 individuals (390 girls, 255 boys, 138 women and 32 men) with different messages around SRHR and child marriage. In the Amhara region, unmarried, out-of-school girls were identified and selected with 20 out-of-school girls’ clubs established in four woredas (five clubs in each woreda). 103 trainers (65 female and 38 male) were trained on life skills development to support the girls in these clubs. Unmarried girls participate in monthly discussion meetings on issues linked to puberty, SRHR, consequences of child marriage, assertiveness, communication, peer pressure and other topics.

In 2021, 7,413 girls also received support to continue their education. The programme targeted disadvantaged female students who were at risk of dropping out due to the lack of education materials, including exercise books, pens, pencils and other materials as their families would not have otherwise been able to cover these costs. An additional 2,513 girls received similar school material support with funding from other sources during the year. 15 schools were also provided with tutorial programmes to support the girls to stay in school through the Global Programme in 2021. The tutorials focused on selected subjects, such as chemistry, physics, mathematics and English. In addition to improving the academic ability of the girls to prepare them for their final exams, the tutorial programme further helps develop the girls’ self-confidence.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The closure of schools due to the conflict in some areas of the country impacted the life skills training for girls and boys normally taking place within the education system. It also negatively impacted the finalization of the out-of-school girls’ empowerment and boys’ engagement manuals due to a delay in gathering data to inform a formative assessment for the manuals – which meant that they were delayed. Girls in SNNP, Sidama, Afar and Oromia regions were targeted as listener groups for the radio programme (a talk show) implemented in collaboration with the Population Media Centre.

Based on learning from this programme the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual and implementation guide have now been developed and will be rolled out in 2022, including continuous training of facilitators and mentors engaged in the programme. The manual is designed in a way that the skill delivery is interwoven with a set of other interventions aiming to end child marriage. This is to be done over a period of four months which gives time for practice and internalization of the learning and gives the girls full access to mentorships through this extended period. Going into 2022, as the manual is rolled out, it is meant to significantly enhance the girls’ sense of self-worth and efficacy, including negotiation skills to delay child marriage and knowledge of where to receive essential services in the case of a child or forced marriage.

A key lesson learned through the programme is that just completing the training by the adolescent girls may not fully guarantee the desired change to end child marriage. Adolescent girls need to be engaged with various other interventions, including refresher training and continuous engagement as part of clubs. Hence, the programme has been targeting girls with a mix of different initiatives to reinforce messages and enable them to practice the knowledge and skills gained. This includes involving them in community outreach activities, club leadership and participation in the training delivered through mobile and the IVR system to encourage girls to share what they have learned with their peers. This has helped to increase resilience and adaptability of the interventions in humanitarian contexts. In addition, the use of a mix of approaches contributed to strengthening the quality of the interventions overall.

Enhancing the family and community environment

One of the critical achievements observed at the community-level is the change in the child marriage practice from using community resources. This is witnessed through anecdotal evidence, such as field-level discussions and testimonies from more than 60 per cent of the communities in the targeted regions by the programme and declaring their readiness to abandon both
child marriage and FGM. This is a result of five years of community mobilization and learning from experiences. UNFPA, UNICEF and the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA) commissioned a structured community readiness assessment to verify the status of the community to end child marriage and the efficacy to bring and maintain sustainable results.

The community testimonies captured through the assessment from both community members as well as representatives at the woreda and kebele (municipality) administration-level show a reduction in the incidence of child marriage, a proactiveness in implementing prevention and response mechanisms. These include thorough tracking and reporting of child marriage arrangements, an increased value put on girls’ education and careers and a willingness to financially support vulnerable girls due to the economic status of their family. Meanwhile, five other communities have done their own assessment, with a brief checklist, and raised green and white flags to signify that their community members are committed to ending the practice. This has created a positive competitive spirit among communities to commit to ending child marriage and to promote alternative life options for adolescent girls. These results will be further validated with the social and behaviour change baseline-midline-endline survey initiated through a partnership between the Global Programme and John Hopkins University and the International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP).

The programme engaged 504,986 (262,647 female and 242,339 male) community members in dialogues concerning child marriage throughout the year. Men and women of different age groups, community leaders, religious leaders, boys, girls and iddir (savings groups) members believe that community conversations are key interventions in contributing to changes in attitudes and practices as they focus on collective reflection and
examine unquestioned assumptions around child marriage, unequal gender dynamics affecting gender roles and lower support for girls’ education.

These community conversations encourage joint action to abandon child marriage through discussions, individual and group awareness-raising activities, tracking child marriage arrangements and provision of access to support services for survivors. Moreover, religious leaders are encouraged to reflect on theological sources, build consensus and educate their followers using various platforms, such as Sunday school, Friday or Jumaa prayer and other congregations.

A recent field mission by the programme to Sidama and a discussion held with Christian and Muslim leaders and their followers has shown that their engagement facilitates a change in attitudes and practices. As a result of community conversations targeting religious leaders and institutions, 22,497 (14,055 male and 8,442 female) community members have been mobilized to champion change in ending child marriage in their respective communities. Furthermore, in the Gambella region, Norwegian Church Aid engaged an additional 259 (164 female and 95 male) religious leaders and other community leaders through awareness-raising and capacity building around child marriage, gender equality and SRHR to promote adolescent-friendly health services in their communities. In the Amhara region, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs organized a high-level advocacy workshop for 274 (200 male and 74 female) religious leaders in 2021. Of these, 120 were selected from the Muslim community and 154 from the Christian community.

The main discussion points focused on the relationship between religion and marriage, family formation, the preaching of the Holy Bible or the Qur’an and child marriage and its consequences. After thorough discussions, the religious leaders unanimously agreed on the following directives to their congregations, church/mosque leaders, priests and sheikhs: (1) all church and mosque leaders, priests and sheikhs must discourage child marriage and should not bless any child marriage; (2) before blessing any marriage they should get a marriage approval from the relevant religious or government institution; (3) followers and parents should be educated through churches and mosques on the consequences and impacts of child marriage on their children; and (4) followers and parents must have marriage approval from the relevant institution before bringing their children to the priest or sheikh for marriage.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

One lesson learned is that strategic documents used to implement child marriage interventions need to have a gender-transformative lens to instill an effective social and gender norm change process. As a result, the manuals and implementation guides, including the community conversation toolkit, have been redesigned and enriched to promote gender equality effectively.

This has been done by promoting inter-generational dialogues to examine and challenge beliefs, stereotypes and myths that support the practice of child marriage and reinforce the lower position of women in society. For example, the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual and the boys’ and men’s engagement intervention package, which is under finalization, are designed in such a way as to facilitate social and gender norms in addition to skill-building for both girls and boys.
To develop the boys’ and men’s engagement intervention package, the programme also leveraged the experience of the programme in Uganda with regards to male engagement. Hence, the roll-out of these interventions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the programme. Similarly, there is a plan to support the standardization of community bylaws without losing the principle of being context-specific and to apply a sensitive agenda to local contexts.

**Strengthening systems**

The formal and non-formal systems that guarantee girls’ protection against child marriage and support their empowerment to thrive in their lives have been strengthened in Ethiopia. This has been done through successful and need-based capacity building that the programme has provided to key actors. As a result, 16,003 cases of child marriage arrangements were identified and reported by both formal and non-formal structures during the year, compared to 3,749 child marriage cases reported in 2020. This is a 327 per cent increase in reporting in 2021. Of these, 3,005 cases were successfully annulled during the reporting period.

The major reason behind an annulment of a child marriage is because of the girl rejecting it due to her knowledge around the adverse effects of the practice, as well as their confidence and ability to exercise their rights. Furthermore, community structures are also positively contributing to the increased reporting and nullification of child marriages. Community surveillance mechanisms, Women Development Groups and anti-harmful traditional practices committees present at the community level also continue to follow-up cases of cancelled child marriages to ensure that girls rescued do not face the risk of being pressured to enter similar marriage arrangements going forward.

For increased access of girls to prevention and protection services there needs to be a deliberate attempt to build the capacity of service providers through training on how to dispense quality, adolescent-friendly and timely services to their clientele. Therefore, the Global Programme has introduced the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach, as part of supporting a gender-transformative change, in collaboration with CARE Ethiopia. This approach includes training for justice, social service and health sector personnel, who provide essential prevention and response services related to child marriage.

This new training approach has shifted the traditional training method of service providers related to child marriage. The SAA builds the workforce capacity, makes participants clarify and examine their own attitudes and values and ensures consistency with the programme objective of ending child marriage by addressing gender inequality, stereotypes and biases, while providing services to girls rescued, at risk or survivors of child marriage. This initiative is jointly implemented through the Global Programme and a Canada-funded initiative to eliminate FGM in Ethiopia.

**Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool: Ethiopia Report**

“It was noted that to make meaningful change in discriminatory gender norms in the communities, it is important to integrate gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches to already existing manuals and activities of government workforces (in particular health, justice and social service). To make this happen, the attitudes and values regarding gender equality, including child marriage, of these service providers need to be aligned with the objectives of the programme. Limited knowledge of stakeholders on the topic of gender and policies alike leading to lower commitment have been identified as a challenge. Therefore, capacity-building and values clarification on gender and social norms should be given to these service providers (health, justice, and social service workforce) for the programme to be gender-transformative through approaches such as the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach.”

LESSONS LEARNED

One positive lesson learned relating to working with grassroots organizations and community structures is their ability to ensure continuity of the mobilization and case tracking efforts regardless of challenging contexts. As such organizations are primarily composed of community members, grassroots organizations and community structures, they are perfectly familiar with the social and cultural context, which enables them to take timely and prompt action should the need arise.

These community structures also played a critical role in reporting child marriage arrangements when schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are playing an essential role during the prolonged conflict in the northern part of the country. For this reason, the programme will further strengthen this engagement modality and continue to support these efforts at scale.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

In 2021, the Global Programme made a strategic shift on examining, demonstrating and advocating budget tracking of allocation and utilization of funds to end child marriage in Ethiopia. The government and key development actors have moved from rolling out the national costed roadmap to the implementation of key interventions at different levels, to simultaneously track expenditure and assess performance. UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs in conducting a systematic tracking exercise after the first year (July 2020–June 2021) of implementation of the roadmap, covering federal level partners and two target regions (Somali and SNNP). This exercise shows the government’s willingness to measure the extent to which political commitment is translated into concrete action, assessing allocation and utilization of budget, progress against key performance indicators and holding key stakeholders accountable.

The analysis and report are undergoing finalization and are expected to be completed in 2022. The initial findings suggest that the budget allocation and expenditure dedicated to activities preventing harmful practices from both governmental and non-governmental sources has increased. In addition, the rate of achievement on key performance indicators for the first year has moved from 80 per cent to more than 100 per cent, despite Ethiopia’s current challenging context, thus showing relatively good progress. The expenditure tracking and implementation assessment will inform planned evidence-based advocacy for increased budget allocation and strengthening of accountability mechanisms in the country.

Although expenditure is increasing in nominal terms over the years, the budget in real value terms is not increasing as much due to higher inflation. In addition, the federal source of financing is highly skewed towards development partners, which can create a problem with sustainability. Therefore, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs needs to devise a strong and sustainable financing mechanism and advocate to maintain the promise of a 10 per cent annual increase of the government budget to child marriage interventions. However, looking back on the progress made since the start of Phase II of the programme (in 2020), great progress has been made regarding government commitments to end child marriage...
both at the federal and regional levels. As a result, the roll-out of the costed roadmap, which is the national plan coordinating and streamlining the efforts of different actors, is underway across the country.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The effort to support the endorsement of family law in Afar and Somali regions has been challenging due to the sensitivity of this issue, which attracts attention among the constituents of the Islamic population. Among the sections of the law that is sensitive and divisive is the age of marriage accepted in the Islamic faith. Other areas being contested include polygamy, rights of an adopted child, irregular unions and the determination of paternity using a DNA test.

Another challenge is the shift in focus both at the regional and federal level due to the prevailing conflict and the deprioritizing of some interventions, such as the endorsement of this law, due to the focus on the large-scale life-saving humanitarian response. However, a consultation organized at the beginning of the year noted that the law needs to have articles framed in a way that consider international human rights standards while responding to the concerns of community leaders.

To this end, a taskforce composed of legal experts from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, UNICEF, UN Women and Save the Children has been established to provide technical support in the articulation of the specific articles, making sure they align to national and international human rights standards. The programme has also benefited from various learning and exchange opportunities, such as with Sudan and Egypt, focusing on lessons towards developing and endorsing personal or family laws, including on the age of marriage and other women rights issues in dominantly Muslim communities.

Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2021, UNFPA and UNICEF engaged CISP Ethiopia and John Hopkins University to assess the extent of change in knowledge, attitudes, intent to change practices and norms around child marriage and FGM among adolescents, caregivers and key influencers in seven regions in Ethiopia over a four-year period (2021-2024). This was done so as to inform social and behaviour change and related programming initiatives. This is a first-time strategic shift towards working directly with a university for the Global Programme in Ethiopia. John Hopkins University brings a wide range of expertise and previous experiences of working with other communities in systematically measuring social norms change in a structured manner of establishing baselines, midlines and endlines, which are seen as critical in evaluating progress and change.

In the Amhara region, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs provided training to 13 (nine male and four female) experts of the District Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs on data collection processes at district-level home-to-home visits. These 13 trained experts then went back to their respective districts and trained 327 (171 male and 156 female) data collectors at kebele level while conducting home-to-home visits. After the training, data collecting tools were prepared and distributed to the trained data collectors. The data collecting tool included key indicators about family, age, education status, marital status and FGM status. Currently, data on 28,141 girls has been collected from all 142 kebeles entered into the database.
The prevailing security situation in the Tigray, Afar and Oromia regions made active participation and input from relevant stakeholders in these regions challenging with regards to evidence generation. Thus, most deliverables were submitted behind deadlines, which impacted the timeframe of interventions dependent on those evidence generation efforts. For example, the finalization, validation and rollout of the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual was earlier projected to happen in the last quarter of 2021, but it was then pushed back to the first quarter of 2022.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

One of the lessons learned in getting data from the current context is that it requires extensive expertise in gathering data using virtual platforms. However, even the online data collection process requires securing an ethical clearance for data collection, which is worth paying attention to and giving proper planning for, including the Institutional Review Board mechanism, which is relevant for different research initiatives.

Partnership in focus: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)

GAGE is a member of the National Alliance and supports the national effort to end child marriage through different assessments and evidence generation initiatives on topics such as adolescents’ well-being and COVID-19, data and evidence from which the Global Programme has benefitted. UNICEF is a strategic partner to GAGE as it technically and financially supported GAGE through the workplan of the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs to develop an assessment and verification tool for community readiness for the abandonment of harmful practices. Furthermore, UNICEF has supported GAGE with relevant documents such as the ACT framework on social norms change, the indicator bank developed by the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and other tools, informing the assessment and verification tools currently rolled out in Ethiopia and widely used by child marriage actors. GAGE is also a member of the Global Programme technical advisory committee that was established to support strategic initiatives, such as the social and behaviour change baseline-midline-endline study, the redesigning of community conversations and the development of manuals and intervention packages for out-of-school girls and male engagement.
