



# ETHIOPIA CASE STUDY

Review of Technology-Based Interventions  
to Address Child Marriage and Female  
Genital Mutilation

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# ETHIOPIA

## ETHIOPIA OVERVIEW

	<b>Child marriage prevalence<sup>1</sup></b> (girls married before the age of 18 years, as a proportion of all girls)	40%
	<b>FGM prevalence<sup>2</sup></b> (proportion of women and girls aged 15–49 years)	65%
	<b>Internet users<sup>3</sup></b> (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	66% of men 58% of women
	<b>Mobile phone ownership<sup>4</sup></b> (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	99% of men 98% of women
	<b>Level of government support for digital literacy<sup>5</sup></b> (scale 0–3) <sup>6</sup>	High: 3

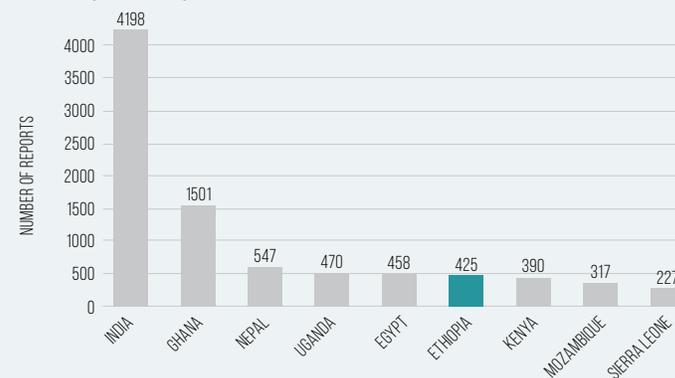
## NEWS ABOUT HARMFUL PRACTICES: WORD CLOUD MAPS AND NUMBERS OF REPORTS

**FIGURE 1.** GDELT word cloud. Most common words portrayed in the reports of the global media for both FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia (2014–2022)

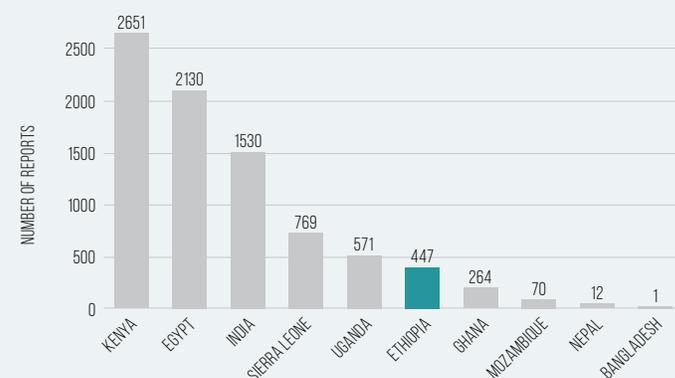


**Note:** This word cloud map was produced with data from the Event Database of the GDELT project, which monitors the world’s broadcast, print, and web news in over 100 languages; identifying the people, locations, institutions, topics, publications, sentiments, numbers, quotations, pictures, and occurrences linked to events worldwide. After filtering the database for a comprehensive pool of keywords related to FGM and child marriage and technology in Ethiopia, the most common words portrayed in the reports related to these issues are mapped in a country word cloud. The bigger the font size, the more frequently the word appears.

**FIGURE 2.** Number of reports covering the topic of child marriage in Ethiopia, compared with other countries (2014–2022)



**FIGURE 3.** Number of reports covering the topic of FGM in Ethiopia, compared with other countries (2014–2022)



**Note:** After filtering the GDELT project database for the actors, actions and associated reports pertaining to FGM and/or child marriage in Ethiopia, it can be observed that there are a total of 425 reports corresponding to child marriage and 447 reports corresponding to FGM in the country.

## THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM IN THE COUNTRY

In Ethiopia, as in much of the rest of the world, child marriage has been declining, with the prevalence of girls married before their 18th birthday dropping from 75 per cent in 1980 to 40 per cent in 2020. This figure represents 17.3 million child brides in the country, with 7.5 million having been married before turning 15 years old.<sup>7</sup> However, Ethiopia still ranks 15th among the highest rates of child marriage in the world and fifth when it comes to the total number of child brides. Moreover, progress across the country remains uneven, as the prevalence of child marriage is declining in some districts while it is rising in others. The regions of Addis Ababa, Amhara and Tigray have experienced declines, whereas an increase in prevalence has been seen in the Oromia and Somali regions. Together with the Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz regions, Oromia and Somali account for nearly half or more of all girls that are married before they are 18.<sup>8</sup>

## THE TECHNOLOGY ENVIRONMENT IN ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, only half of its population of 117.2 million has access to electricity.<sup>10</sup> As the most populated landlocked country in the world, ICT development and deployment is a challenge because of widespread poverty and vast infrastructure needs.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Ethiopia is also one of the least inclusive when it comes to access to the internet (measured by the proportion of households that

Notwithstanding progress made, Ethiopia has to accelerate such efforts to mitigate the practice uniformly across the country to meet the target of eliminating FGM by 2030 as set out in the SDGs. In contrast, while Ethiopia has seen faster progress in eliminating child marriage compared with other high-prevalence countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, it still has the largest absolute number of women and girls who have undergone FGM in the region. It is still widely practised, with 65 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years reporting to have undergone FGM and those who were cut before the age of 5 years constituting more than half of all adolescent girls who underwent the practice. The regions with the highest prevalence are in Eastern Ethiopia, bordering Somalia, where there is currently no anti-FGM legislation in place.<sup>9</sup>

have access to the internet and that have used it in the past 12 months) with only 24 per cent of the population being connected. Although the gender gap in internet access is still in favour of men at 66 per cent while women are at 58 per cent, this gap has decreased over the years and Ethiopia is one of the leading countries across sub-Saharan Africa with increasing female connectivity. In terms of mobile services, the state-run Ethio Telecom is the sole mobile operator present in the country. The telecom provider has expanded its 3G and 4G networks throughout Ethiopia and, as of 2020, 97 per cent of the population is covered by a mobile-cellular network.<sup>12</sup> Mobile telephone subscriptions (i.e., subscriptions to a mobile telephone service) vary across the region, but Ethiopia also has one of the smallest gender gaps in mobile phone access, with 99 per cent of men and 98 per cent of women having access to a mobile phone.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the country has a high smartphone adoption rate at 43 per cent that is set to increase in the coming years driven by a growing interest in gaming and streaming services across sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>14</sup> Only 38 per cent of the population, however, actually owns a mobile phone – a figure that has decreased from 42 per cent in 2018 – now with only 20 active mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.<sup>15</sup>



Despite the difficulty of deploying ICTs in this large, landlocked and primarily rural country, the government invests heavily in the sector's growth and has committed significant resources to improve its infrastructure, service provision and human capital to meet its ambitious targets in the country's national development plan.<sup>16</sup> With key players from the ICT sector and the government's political willingness, Ethiopia has current plans and strategies that address digital literacy for students from primary to tertiary education, including ICT and curriculum training for teachers and the expansion of digital equipment and learning materials in all educational institutions. Ethiopia's renewed e-strategy also seeks to create an enabling environment for ICT growth and development while

creating programmes that encourage students to pursue ICT-related fields.<sup>17</sup>

According to a survey by the Ethiopian Statistics Service, more than 90 per cent of the total population aged 10 years and above have no ability to use a computer. This lack of basic digital skills also reflects a gender digital divide in the country, where 86 per cent of men do not have the ability to use a computer while 93 per cent of women do not.<sup>18</sup> Ethiopia is ranked one of the lowest countries in Africa when it comes to equitable access to information technology.<sup>19</sup> High offline activity and inequality in the country highlights wider social norms that manifest themselves in a digital context.

## MAPPING OF TECH INTERVENTIONS

The interventions mapped in this section stem from an initial landscape exercise conducted jointly by UNFPA and UNICEF, followed by a systematic review of publicly available data and information on technology-driven and technology-enabled interventions addressing child marriage and/or FGM in Ethiopia. The compiled information was curated and complemented with insights emerging from key informant interviews conducted with local stakeholders.

### CODING TYPE OF INTERVENTION

- [☉] Technology-driven intervention/solution (tech is a core element)
- [⦿] Technology-enabled intervention/solution (tech is secondary to the intervention, there are other non-tech components)

## ♀ FEMINIST LENSES

The seventh column of the interventions table below identifies how organizations have included feminist lenses into the design and implementation of the interventions by highlighting four key aspects:

1 Consultation with experts and/or community leaders	Consultations with gender or thematic experts and/or local leaders were conducted during the development, implementation, and/or monitoring and evaluation of the interventions.
2 Consultations with target group(s)	The interventions incorporated, at any stage, consultations with the populations targeted, especially girls and women of different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, classes, and other social markers.
3 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) instruments	Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out to measure the intervention's progress and sustainability, and/or to generate disaggregated information, gender-sensitive/responsive indicators, and/or gender analysis frameworks.
4 Women and/or girl-led organization(s)	The intervention was designed and/or implemented, partly or completely, by a woman and/or girl-led organization(s).

Additional descriptive information about the feminist lenses and potential intersectional approach (i.e., addressing ethnicity, language, class or other aspects of the target group's identity) is provided within the table, following the general description of each intervention, which can be identified by the use of this symbol [♀]. This analysis is based on information collected during semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and/or publicly available information.

## BERHANE HEWAN / 2004 – 2008 / ○

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● UNFPA</li> <li>● Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs</li> <li>● Amhara Regional Bureau of Women, Children and Youth</li> </ul>	Population Council	Child marriage	Amhara	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual level empowerment</li> <li>2. Family and community engagement</li> <li>3. Economic empowerment</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School trainings</li> <li>● Mobile phones</li> <li>● Solar lanterns</li> </ul>	N/A <sup>20</sup>

Berhane Hewan, meaning 'Light for Eve' in Amharic, works by changing local opportunity structures and addressing motivations for child marriage. It involved a combination of tutoring, group formation, support for girls to remain in school, and incentives and community engagement and awareness. Its conditional asset transfer involves the provision of solar lanterns if a daughter remains unmarried and in school until she is at least 18 years old. These also help them study after dark and charge their mobile phones. Girls are also taught to generate money by charging neighbours to power up their mobile phones with their own lanterns. Over 750 girls joined the programme while it was implemented.<sup>21</sup>

## INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR) TECHNOLOGY / 2020 – ONGOING / ○

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● UNICEF</li> <li>● VIAMO</li> </ul>	Child marriage & FGM	Afar, Amhara, Gambella, Oromia, SNNPR and Somali regions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual level empowerment</li> <li>2. Family and community engagement</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mobile phones</li> <li>● Interactive voice response (IVR) technology</li> <li>● Radio programmes</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consultations with experts and/or community leaders</li> <li>2. M&amp;E instruments</li> </ol>

This project is meant to reach adolescent leaders of girls' clubs and create social and behavioural change by providing them with a user-friendly information helpline and remote training using IVR as an interactive medium. Through IVR technology, girls are provided with weekly content from child marriage and FGM experts, guidance on facilitating discussions with their peers as well as push messaging services about these harmful practices.<sup>22</sup> According to representatives from UNICEF Ethiopia and Viamo, these services created an alternative channel during COVID-19 and proved to raise awareness on child marriage and FGM and change users' (girls' club leaders and community members) behaviours, expressing more negative attitudes towards these practices and greater willingness to report them. Radio programmes would also help advertise the hotline number, and the training content for capacity development is structured in a way that users can easily digest engaging content within 5 minutes without dropping the call. The pilot project was reported to have reached 500 adolescent girls and will soon be scaled up to 5,500 girls from 9 different regions.

♀ This intervention also integrates an intersectional feminist approach by consulting with experts of child marriage and FGM for the IVR content delivered. Moreover, the technology can easily gather real-time data of its reach effectiveness, and it ensures two-way communication so that girls and community leaders can provide regular feedback on the programme.

## POPULAR EDUCATION TECHNIQUES / 1994 – ONGOING / 1

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
Educational Media Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization for the Development of Women and Children (ODWaCE)</li> <li>The Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS)</li> </ul>	FGM	Nationwide	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual level empowerment</li> <li>Family and community engagement</li> <li>Economic empowerment</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audiovisual training materials</li> <li>Radio programmes</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with experts and/or community leaders</li> <li>M&amp;E instruments</li> </ol>

This project implemented by AIDOS and ODWaCE, with the former National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia focused on providing training and information to school communities and the wider public to increase awareness on FGM and its consequences.<sup>23</sup> ODWaCE's popular education techniques involve the use of both mainstream media and social media for their advocacy work to change existing practices, laws and policies that adversely affect children and women subject to FGM. They work on thematic areas such as SRH, women's economic empowerment, teenage pregnancy and women's precarity. These interventions take place at local, regional and national levels and involve training socially influential individuals to make them duty-bearers for information campaigns targeting particular audiences (e.g., schools, religious leaders, health authorities). According to the Executive Director of ODWaCE, their recent media dialogue intervention in 2021 reached approximately 25,000 people nationwide.

♀ This intervention also integrates an intersectional feminist approach by fully engaging its target users at all levels and across different age and class groups. ODWaCE also holds joint review sessions with women and girls and maintains a 50:50 gender parity in their advisory councils.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 Demographic and Health Survey (2016), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *Ethiopia country profile*
- 2 Demographic and Health Survey (2016), as cited in UNICEF (2020g)
- 3 Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Economist Impact (2022)
- 6 The score on government support for digital literacy, on a scale from 0–3 (low to high), reflects a government plan or strategy to address digital literacy for students and/or teachers – through the design and development of courses in ICT skills, computer science, programming or other classes for students; and through ICT capacity-building courses for teachers. A zero score indicates that the government does not have such a plan/strategy, neither for students and nor for teachers; a score of 1 reflects a plan for student digital literacy but without including teacher capacity-building; a medium score of 2 indicates a current plan for both; and the highest score of 3 reflects a plan addressing both students and teachers, and with the courses and capacity-building starting at the primary school level.
- 7 UNICEF and UNFPA (2021c)
- 8 Erulkar (2022)
- 9 UNICEF (2020g)
- 10 World Bank (2020f)
- 11 ITU (2018)
- 12 ITU (2020b)
- 13 Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- 14 I (2022c)
- 15 ITU (2020b)
- 16 Economist Impact (2022)
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 ESS (2021)
- 19 CIPESA (2017)
- 20 Organization/intervention not interviewed
- 21 Population Council (2016)
- 22 VIAMO (2022)
- 23 Spadacini and Nichols (1998)

REVIEW OF  
**TECHNOLOGY-BASED  
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TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE AND  
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

