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Synthesis of the risks and likelihood of pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices
Country Snapshot

Ethiopia

▸ RISK OF EXPERIENCING PUSHBACK: MODERATE

RISK OF
EXPERIENCING
← PUSHBACK

Ethiopia has made strides in reducing female genital mutilation and child marriage through community-driven and international aid initiatives. However, pushback remains in rural regions, where these practices persist as a cultural and religious rite. Both conflict and climate induced emergencies in Ethiopia make it hard to eradicate these practices, and laws to combat them are yet to be fully implemented.

The level of risk of pushback has been determined through a desk review and in-country consultations, undertaken in 2024.

Ethiopia has made considerable progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in recent decades, supported by a combination of legal reforms, community-driven initiatives, and international partnerships. The country's Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM (2020-2024) serves as a guiding framework and demonstrates commitment to ending these harmful practices. However, child marriage and FGM persist, particularly in rural, climate-affected and conflict-affected regions, where cultural norms and economic pressures continue to drive resistance. According to recent data, FGM prevalence fell from 79.9 per cent in 2000 to 65.2 per cent in 2016, with the highest prevalence in the Somali and Afar regions. Similarly, child marriage has declined, though nearly 40 per cent of girls are still married before the age of 18.¹

This document examines the complex dynamics of pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices in Ethiopia, focusing on the cultural, economic, and systemic barriers that hinder progress in this area. By analysing evolving trends and discourse, it aims to provide actionable recommendations for countering resistance and fostering sustainable change.

This analysis draws on a desk review, consultations with government, international, and local organizations, as well as religious representatives, and a workshop held in Addis Ababa in December 2024. The discussions revealed the key challenges in eliminating these practices as well as the role of local actors in the efforts.

¹ UNICEF, 'Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS)', 2016.

Synthesis of the risks and likelihood of pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices

Resistance to eliminating FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia is still deeply rooted in cultural identity, economic dependencies, and religious misinterpretations. Pushback is particularly strong in rural, climate-affected and conflict-affected areas, where these practices are framed as protective measures or integral traditions.

Long-standing sociocultural norms and practices

driving pushback: Deeply rooted cultural norms and misinterpretations of religious teachings remain central drivers of FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, perpetuating these harmful practices despite growing advocacy and legal efforts.

- **Cultural and social drivers for continuation:**

Cultural norms are still a powerful driver of FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. For example, in South Ethiopia Regional State and among the Oromo in Oromia, FGM is perceived as a rite of passage essential to preserving purity and securing marriage. Traditional leaders, including birth attendants and clan elders, hold significant influence over community norms, often matching that of religious leaders. They reinforce the belief that 'cutting' is vital to family honour and social acceptance. FGM is frequently conducted during infancy, especially in the Afar region, where it is commonly performed around a girl's first birthday. In the Somali region, the procedure may take place at any point before marriage, with infibulation (Type III) being the predominant form of FGM in both regions.² Mixed-methods research conducted in 2022 in three districts of Ethiopia's Afar region, showed that many girls and caregivers believed that FGM should continue, citing culture rather than religion as the major reason – FGM is an integral part of the cultural identity of Afar women and secures the status in society. Qualitative evidence from the study revealed that the perceived social benefits of FGM, specifically those of marriageability and controlling girls' sexuality

to avoid promiscuity, were seen to outweigh the health risks.³ In the Amhara region, another cultural belief that justifies FGM is the myth of Chinch, a 'fictitious abnormal physical growth that covers the entrance to female genitalia'⁴ and must be removed by performing FGM, or else it will inhibit both sexual penetration and childbirth.⁵

Similarly, child marriage is upheld as a way to protect family honour and shield girls from out-of-wedlock pregnancies, which are heavily stigmatized in these communities. Data from the Ethiopia Young Adult Survey (2009), which interviewed 10,080 young persons aged 12–24 across seven regions, show that 70 per cent of married girls were in marriages arranged by their parents, and nearly all girls who married before age 15 had their husbands chosen for them.⁶ The same data indicates prevalence of arranged marriage is highest in Amhara (95 per cent) and lowest in Somali Region (41 per cent).⁷ More recent qualitative research found that parental control and social expectations continue to shape girls' marriage decisions.⁸ Parents choose to marry off their daughters to protect their honour, as a girl's premarital pregnancy is perceived as devastating to her and her family's reputation. Marriage is also seen as a protective measure against sexual violence because it ensures girls have a husband who can provide security. Finally, it cements ties between families and can increase their prestige.⁹

- **Religious misinterpretations and social stigma:**

Misinterpretations of religious teachings are another significant factor perpetuating these harmful practices. In early 2024, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) issued a Fatwa¹⁰ to reverse the Policy of FGM by upgrading FGM from *Sunnah* (a recommended practice) to *Wajib* (obligatory). While framed as a push for medicalization and safety, this statement effectively condones the continuation of FGM, legitimizing the practice under a medical pretext.

² Mehari, Getaneh, 'Ending Female Genital Mutilation: Progress and Challenges in the Somali Region, Ethiopia', 2023.

³ Presler-Marshall, Elizabeth et al., 'Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia's Afar Region: Patterning, Drivers, and Decision-Making', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 75, no. 3, 11 July 2024.

⁴ Centre for Interfaith Action, 'The Faith Effect: A Facilitator Manual to Train Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) Faith Leaders', 2012.

⁵ Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 'Female genital mutilation: Beliefs, traditions, and values', 2023.

⁶ Jones, Nicola et al., 'Constrained choices: Exploring the complexities of adolescent girls' voice and agency in child marriage decisions in Ethiopia', 2020.

⁷ Erulkar, A. et al., 'Early Marriage in Amhara Region, Ethiopia Berhane Hewan ('Light for Eve') Increasing Opportunities to Delay Marriage and Promote Schooling the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs', 2012.

⁸ Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E., & Tefera, B. (2020). Constrained choices: Exploring the complexities of adolescent girls' voice and agency in child marriage decisions in Ethiopia. *Global Social Policy*, 20(2), 314–336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993420958215>

⁹ Kok, M.C. et al., 'Drivers of child marriage in specific settings of Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia – findings from the Yes I Do! baseline study', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 23, no. 794, 2023.

¹⁰ A fatwa is a non-binding legal opinion in Islam, issued by a qualified scholar in response to a question from an individual, judge, or authority. It clarifies how Islamic law applies to issues not explicitly addressed in the Qur'an or Hadith and guides Muslims in making personal, social, financial, or ethical decisions.

Such declarations highlight the ongoing support for FGM in certain religious circles, especially among the Islamic communities, complicating efforts to eradicate it.¹¹

Similarly, among some Orthodox Christian communities, child marriage is viewed as a means to ensure purity and prevent infidelity. This belief is rooted in religious and cultural traditions that emphasize virginity as a sign of moral virtue and family honour. Maintaining purity before marriage is seen as essential for securing a girl's reputation and ensuring a successful marriage, while preventing infidelity is linked to preserving family stability and upholding religious values.¹² A 2017 consolidated report assessing efforts to engage with faith-based organizations to abandon FGM in Ethiopia, showed that many of the faith actor participants who learned about the negative consequences of FGM during workshops and other awareness-building exercises, may promise to abandon the practice, but do not honour this promise when they return to their communities and still perpetuate the practice in private. The compelling information they gained during their training did not change their behaviour. This is attributed to deep-rooted social norms, community pressure, and the fear of ostracization, which compel faith leaders to conform despite

publicly committing to abandonment. The absence of accountability and follow-up strategies, along with family expectations and the risk of losing influence, also contribute to their reluctance to reject FGM within their communities fully.¹³

Economic and systemic barriers: Constraints such as poverty, weak governance, and the impacts of conflict and displacement, perpetuate FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, making it challenging to enforce laws and protect vulnerable girls.

- **Economic dependence on harmful practices:** Poverty is a central driver of both FGM and child marriage, with families often relying on these practices for economic stability. As reported by a key informant, practitioners of FGM depend on it as a source of income.¹⁴ Child marriage, often seen as a means of financial security, is similarly justified within the context of poverty, where dowries offer economic relief for families.¹⁵ There are other instances where young men who cannot afford to pay the bride price, work with their families and friends to abduct a girl and rape her in the hope that her family will then offer her to the young man. This is most common in the Southern regions.¹⁶



¹¹ African Women of Faith Network (AWoFN), 'Press Statement on FGM in Ethiopia', 2024.

¹² Youth Lives, 'Child Marriage and Female Circumcision (FGM/C): Evidence from Ethiopia', 2014.

¹³ UNICEF, 'Concerted Efforts of FBOs to Abandon FGM & CEFM in Ethiopia: A Consolidated Report', 2017.

¹⁴ KII1, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA), Ethiopia.

¹⁵ Jones, Nicola et al., 'Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A review of the evidence and an analysis of the prevalence of child marriage in hotspot districts', March 2016.

¹⁶ Boyden, Jo et al., 'Harmful Traditional Practices and Child Protection: Contested Understandings and Practices of Female Child Marriage and Circumcision in Ethiopia', 2013.



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- **Weak governance and legal enforcement:**

Although Ethiopia has enacted laws prohibiting FGM and child marriage, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in rural areas where traditional customs hold significant influence. Local leaders often prioritize customary practices over statutory law, undermining the effectiveness of national legislation. Corruption and limited resources further weaken enforcement, with some wealthy families bribing officials to avoid legal consequences.¹⁷ The gap in enforcement creates a challenging environment for child protection efforts. Specifically concerning FGM, while the law criminalizes the practice, some mothers, driven by misinformation about its religious importance, fear of community rejection and the possibility of promiscuity, continue to have their daughters cut in secrecy. The threat of arrest and legal repercussions has not deterred these practices because of poor enforcement of the law and the prevailing belief that tradition and social

acceptance outweigh legal mandates. This creates a vicious cycle where harmful practices persist despite the existence of laws meant to prevent them and where social pressure continues to supersede legal frameworks in determining the futures of young girls.¹⁸

- **Conflict, climate shocks and displacement:**

Conflict and climate-induced crises have exacerbated the prevalence of FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, particularly in displacement settings. In conflict-affected regions such as Tigray and parts of Amhara, child marriage and, in some communities, FGM linked to marriageability, have re-emerged as coping mechanisms for families seeking protection and stability. For instance, some families subject girls to FGM to deter sexual violence during conflict because it makes it more difficult for perpetrators to abuse girls if they are cut, while others marry off daughters to secure dowries or reduce household burdens.^{19,20}

¹⁷ KII2, Love in Action for People Development Organization (LAPDO), Ethiopia

¹⁸ Gibson, Mhairi A., Eshetu Gurmu, Beatriz Cobo, María M. Rueda and Isabel M. Scott, 'Indirect questioning method reveals hidden support for female genital cutting in South Central Ethiopia', 2018.

¹⁹ Mwai, Peter, 'Ethiopia conflict: How is aid flowing to Tigray?', BBC News 6 January 2023, www.bbc.com/news/57929853; Al Jazeera, 'UN: Warring sides committing atrocities in Ethiopia's Tigray', 19 September 2022, www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/19/un-warring-sides-committing-atrocities-in-ethiopia-tigray

²⁰ Consultation with UNICEF COs

Evolving Trends and Discourse on Harmful Practices

Efforts to eliminate FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia are shaped by evolving advocacy strategies, shifting perceptions, persistent resistance rooted in cultural and religious norms and economic needs. These evolving dynamics underscore the importance of community-driven, culturally sensitive interventions in countering pushback.

Community and religious engagement: Community and religious leaders hold significant influence in shaping societal norms in Ethiopia, so their engagement is crucial to efforts aimed at changing these norms. The importance of engaging faith and community leaders is also referenced in the Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM (2020-2024). However, their role can vary significantly depending on the local context, with some leaders driving change by discouraging harmful practices, while others reinforce and help preserve them. Moreover, personal ideas, interpretations of religious teachings and communal expectations all contribute to defining the variations.

- **Faith-based engagement:** faith-engagement has been instrumental in challenging religious justifications for FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, particularly through partnerships with religious institutions. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM (UNJP-FGM) has collaborated with the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) to engage religious leaders at national, regional, and grass-roots levels. In 2023, this partnership produced the Religious Leaders Communication Teaching Manual, which serves as a foundation for education campaigns against harmful practices.²¹ At the subnational level, success stories such as Dalocha Woreda in Central Ethiopia, demonstrate the impact of faith-based advocacy, where local sheikhs collectively denounced FGM and implemented a community bylaw with enforcement by a committee of male and female representatives.²² Between 2010 and 2016, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) worked with seven IRCE members, including the Ethiopian

Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), to promote the abandonment of FGM and child marriage. These efforts reached 47 woredas across ten zones, including Amhara, Somali, and Afar. National-level position statements on FGM and child marriage were then developed by most members, although gaps remained with some organizations.²³ Additionally, the Centre for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (CIGA) piloted an initiative from 2010 to 2012 with religious leaders from the EOTC and Muslim scholars in Amhara. The pilot resulted in doubled opposition to FGM and child marriage among participating leaders and the development of a training manual for Orthodox leaders.²⁴ Its success is attributed to the engagement of faith leaders within the context of their values and beliefs, the creation of space for a shift in their attitudes, and the incorporation of easy-to-use models, messages, baseline assessments and tools for the congregations.²⁵ While faith-based advocacy has made significant progress in fostering community acceptance, its reach remains uneven, especially in rural areas where conservative interpretations dominate.

- **Community-led initiatives:** Community-led efforts in Ethiopia have been instrumental in addressing FGM and child marriage through culturally tailored approaches. The Organization for Development of Women and Children in Ethiopia has supported elimination efforts with research and reports that are shared with government ministries, as well as NGOs and other CSOs. It is also a member of the nation's harmful traditional practices strategy and the national alliance to end child marriage.²⁶ The Consortium of Reproductive Health Associations also promotes knowledge-sharing about matters related to sexual and reproductive health through platforms like Share-Net Ethiopia.²⁷ In 2022, Love in Action for People Development led an awareness-raising initiative in the Afar region using *Daagu*, a rapid local information dissemination mechanism, that was very successful.²⁸

²¹ UNICEF, 'UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating the elimination of an extreme form of violence against girls', 2022.

²² UNICEF, 'Good practices on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilations and Child Marriage programme in Southern Nations Nationalities and People's region', 2022.

²³ Norwegian Church Aid, 'Concerted Efforts of FBOs to Abandon FGM & CEFM in Ethiopia: A Consolidated Report', 2017.

²⁴ UNICEF, 'UNICEF-UNFPA Engagements with Faith Institutions and Religious Actors in 17 Countries in 2023', 2024.

²⁵ CIGA, 'Equipping Faith Leaders to Empower Girls in Ethiopia and Nigeria – Final Report', 2012.

²⁶ 28 Too Many, 'Country Profile: FGM in Ethiopia', 2013.

²⁷ Share-Net Ethiopia, 'About Us', n.d., <https://share-net-ethiopia.org/about/>

²⁸ KII2, Love in Action for People's Development Organisation (LAPDO), Ethiopia.

Survivors of FGM are also active in educating their communities about the harms of FGM,²⁹ and in Oromia, local community leaders like Abba Geddas and Hade Sinkes have become advocates for change, implementing tailored community based interventions in collaboration with the Regional Bureaus of Women and Social Affairs and their respective woreda-level offices across 10 regions.³⁰ The UNJP-FGM has facilitated impactful community engagement, such as public declarations against FGM in Afar, supported by community bylaws enforced by social sanction committees. The UNJP-FGM also partnered with Girl Effect, Population Media Center, FANA Broadcasting and Wings Education and Media to launch the Yegna TV series in 2022 and the Yalaleke Guzo radio talk show in 2020, reaching 10 million viewers with messages on puberty, FGM and violence, while leveraging media to engage communities.³¹ Other notable organizations include the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the Afar Pastoralist Development Association, which empower communities and provide alternatives to harmful practices.³² The National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM played a strategic role in bringing these actions together by facilitating knowledge sharing, organizing joint advocacy workshops, supporting strategic initiatives, advancing research and evidence generation, developing guidelines and supporting the roll out of the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM (2020-2024).

- **Influence mapping for strategic engagement:**

To drive change effectively, it is critical to identify key influencers beyond conventional religious actors. Traditional leaders, educators, and individuals with lived experience play a crucial role in shaping community attitudes. Based on the workshops and key informant interviews in Ethiopia, conducted as part of this scoping exercise in 2024, three key groups stand out as primary targets for influence and advocacy efforts:

- Middle-aged women (40–55 years old): Having often undergone FGM themselves, they are in a position to share lived experiences and act as community advocates, helping shift narratives from within. Engaging with this groups always needs to be guided by a survivor-centred approach and the Do No Harm principle.

- Muslim women and Islamic teachers: Given their religious authority, particularly in Somali and Afar regions, influencing this group is essential for addressing religious misinterpretations that sustain harmful practices.
- Young girls (10–18 years old): because they are at risk, the meaningful engagement of young girls is essential to driving narrative change. School-going girls can spread awareness within families and peer networks, while digital platforms can further amplify their voices.

Resistance and pushback: Resistance to abandoning FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia is multifaceted, rooted in cultural norms, economic pressures and religious misinterpretations. Media narratives play a complex role in this resistance, acting both as a tool for advocacy and a platform for opposition.

- **The dual role of media:** Journalists have raised awareness by linking these practices to conflicts like the Northern Ethiopia crisis, where FGM and child marriage are used as coping mechanisms to protect girls from violence. Their work has been instrumental in exposing the harmful impacts of these practices and advocating for change. However, some media outlets perpetuate narratives framing international efforts to eliminate child marriage and FGM as cultural imperialism, portraying elimination efforts as an attack on Ethiopia's sovereignty and traditions.³³ This fosters nationalist resistance, reinforcing harmful norms and complicating efforts at reform. Journalists also face backlash from conservative groups who see their coverage as a challenge to cultural traditions. This dual role of the media – as both an advocate for change and a platform for resistance – underscores its significant influence on the pace of progress. Strategically engaging media to amplify locally led abandonment efforts while countering harmful narratives will be critical for overcoming pushback.
- **Cultural and religious resistance:** Despite advocacy gains, resistance to eliminating FGM and child marriage remains significant and takes on both overt and covert forms. In regions like Afar and Somali, cultural identity and religious misinterpretations continue to drive pushback. Communities often frame

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tewodros, Adam, 'Uniting for Change: How community conversations are shaping a safer future for girls', UNICEF, 14 February 2025, www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/uniting-change

³¹ UNICEF and UNFPA, 'Delivering and Sustaining in the New Normal: 2021 Annual Report and Overall Phase III Performance Analysis', 2022.

³² AMREF Health Africa, "'How Could I Sit Back Without Contributing?': The Making of a Local Influencer Against Harmful Traditional Practices', <https://amref.org/ethiopia/2023/01/12/what-it-takes-to-end-harmful-traditional-practices-roles-of-societal-actors/>

³³ Presler-Marshall et al., 'Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia's Afar Region', 2024.

external advocacy efforts as Western interventions that threaten their traditions and sovereignty, and many clan leaders and elderly members of the community remain firm in their support of FGM and child marriage.³⁴ Conservative religious leaders play a key role in amplifying this resistance. Some have openly criticized efforts to end FGM, claiming they undermine religious traditions and cultural identity.³⁵

Shifting perceptions: While resistance remains, there are promising signs of changing attitudes and discourse around FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia. These shifts are driven by youth engagement, culturally relevant efforts, and public declarations by influential leaders.

- **Faith-based advocacy:** In regions like Amhara and Somali, progressive religious leaders have begun to challenge religious justifications for FGM and child marriage. By using community forums and sermons, these leaders reinterpret Islamic teachings, emphasizing that these practices are not religious obligations but rather harmful cultural traditions. This approach aligns religious doctrine with advocacy goals, fostering acceptance among communities that trust religious authorities.³⁶ However, their influence

is often limited due to the authority of highly trusted traditional leaders, as many clan leaders and elders - viewed as the custodians of culture - continue to firmly support FGM and child marriage.³⁷

- **Youth-driven and digital advocacy:** Meanwhile, social media platforms have become critical tools for disseminating information and raising awareness about the severe health risks and long-term societal impacts of FGM. This media-driven discourse has encouraged younger generations, particularly those with greater access to digital platforms, to question and critically assess long-standing norms and traditions, signalling a gradual but promising shift in attitudes.³⁸ Young activists use digital spaces to challenge FGM by highlighting its harm, advocating for bodily autonomy, and pushing for policy change. In Ethiopia, the Yellow Movement (AAU) amplifies survivor voices and mobilizes youth through social media campaigns and calls for stricter law enforcement.³⁹ These movements foster intergenerational dialogue, creating a platform for young people to engage with elders and advocate for change. However, the reach of youth-driven advocacy remains limited in rural areas where access to digital platforms is scarce.⁴⁰



³⁴ KII2, LAPDO, Ethiopia.

³⁵ Setagne, Tesfaye et al., 'Geographic Variation and Factors Associated with Female Genital Mutilation among Reproductive Age Women in Ethiopia: A National Population Based Survey', 2016.

³⁶ UN Women, 'Religious leaders at the forefront of ending gender-based violence in Ethiopia', 2016.

³⁷ UNICEF, 'Tracking Key Insights on Harmful Practices (Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation)', 2024.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Yellow Movement, 'About us', <https://theyellowmovement.org/>

⁴⁰ The Girl Generation, 'The Change Generation: The unstoppable youth movement to end FGM in Africa', 2019.

Conclusion and Path Forward

Ethiopia has made significant strides in advancing efforts to end FGM and child marriage through government commitment, legal reforms, faith-based engagement, civil society organizations, and community-led initiatives. However, resistance to abandoning these harmful practices is still deeply entrenched, driven by cultural identity, religious misinterpretations, and economic dependency. Pushback is particularly strong in rural and conflict-affected areas, where these practices are seen as essential for social acceptance or survival. To effectively counter pushback against efforts to eliminate FGM and child marriage in Ethiopia, strategies must directly address cultural resistance, economic dependencies, and misinformation. By engaging trusted leaders, strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement, and tailoring interventions to the unique needs of communities, it is possible to challenge deeply entrenched norms and foster long-term change. Key recommendations include:

- **Engage religious leaders and faith-based organizations for unified messaging:** Engage religious leaders within faiths in dialogue among themselves for harmonized abandonment messaging. Strengthen support for the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia to develop an interfaith teaching manual that provides harmonized, faith-based messaging against FGM and child marriage. Engage local champions and religious leaders to build trust and credibility, ensuring culturally relevant advocacy efforts resonate with resistant communities. Institutionalize accountability mechanisms to monitor and address leaders who perpetuate harmful practices, ensuring consistent advocacy across all levels of engagement.
- **Scale up localized, culturally sensitive advocacy:** Support grass-roots initiatives to integrate locally led elimination efforts within existing community structures. Engage traditional leaders and leverage community platforms, such as storytelling and cultural events, to frame the abandonment of harmful practices as aligned with Ethiopian values and traditions. A deeper mapping of individual influencers – both formal and informal – would enhance efforts, ensuring engagement with actors who hold the most significant influence in specific communities.
- **Use evidence-based programming to address pushback:** Conduct surveys and rapid participatory assessments to identify behavioural drivers and misconceptions that drive pushback, and tailor interventions to community-specific needs. Use the findings from these surveys to develop targeted

messaging for influential faith actors, traditional leaders and their communities that counters misinformation about FGM and child marriage, focusing on health, rights, and social consequences. Set up community feedback mechanisms and regularly assess the impact of locally led elimination efforts, such as community dialogues, to ensure strategies remain responsive to feedback and evolving dynamics.

- **Strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement to counter resistance:** Harmonize statutory and customary laws to eliminate inconsistencies that hinder the enforcement of anti-FGM and anti-child marriage legislation. Strengthen linkages and collaboration between formal and non-formal structures, including traditional and religious leaders, to enhance community-based enforcement and ensure local buy-in. Train law enforcement and judiciary officials for more effective enforcement, particularly in rural areas where resistance is strongest. Integrate value clarification exercises into capacity-building efforts to address attitudes and perceptions that may affect the implementation of legal frameworks, ensuring a more rights-based and culturally sensitive approach to enforcement.
- **Leverage media and youth engagement to shift perceptions:** Expand media campaigns like Yegna, the TV series, to reach broader audiences with relatable, youth-focused messaging. A radio version would enhance reach in rural areas. Amplify the voices of survivors and youth advocates to challenge stigma and foster intergenerational dialogue about harmful practices. Enhance digital literacy initiatives to combat misinformation on social media platforms and empower young people to lead grass-roots advocacy efforts.
- **Foster accountability and collaboration across sectors:** Encourage community dialogue through events and village meetings to discuss the harms of FGM. Support a government-led national strategy with dedicated funding. Ensure accountability through multisectoral monitoring and strengthen partnerships between the government, NGOs, and faith-based organizations for lasting impact.

Effectively countering pushback will require empowering local advocates, addressing misconceptions, and ensuring that all interventions are community-led, culturally relevant, and designed to transform resistance into acceptance, fostering a sustainable shift in social norms.

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