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# CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE: A Political Economy Analysis of Burkina Faso

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Iris Group

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, Iris Group conducted a political economy analysis (PEA) of the issue of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Burkina Faso to contextualize the work of CEFM consortium grantees<sup>1</sup> and to offer a high-level view of the environment for CEFM programming in the country. Through a desk review and key informant interviews, this analysis found the following:

ANALYSIS PILLAR	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<b>Foundational Factors</b>  <i>(e.g., embedded structures, such as geography, class, ethnicity)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child marriage is highest in the Sahel; girls in rural areas are much more susceptible to be married before 18</li> <li>• Child marriage is highest among the poorest families, and rates only drop below 50% in the richest quintile</li> <li>• Rates of under-18 and under-15 marriage are highest in traditional/animist and Muslim religious groups</li> <li>• Regional disparities in gender equality generally track to child marriage rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to education, health services, and employment (as in urban areas) can contribute to lower child marriage rates</li> <li>• Anti-poverty efforts may alleviate child marriage somewhat, but not eliminate it</li> <li>• High rates among Muslim families suggest that engaging religious leaders is a critical approach</li> <li>• Gender discrimination and gender norms must also be addressed to lower child marriage rates</li> </ul>
<b>Rules of the Game</b>  <i>(e.g. laws, international commitments, policies, social norms)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal marriage begins at 17 for girls/women and 20 for boys/men; easily circumvented due to weak enforcement, loopholes, and exemptions granted by the Code for Persons and the Family</li> <li>• A National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage was adopted in 2015</li> <li>• Relevant social and gender norms include: marriage to seal family alliances; polygamy; female genital mutilation (FGM); taboos around premarital sex, pregnancy before marriage, etc.</li> <li>• Social norms carry more weight over individual behavior than laws in rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy for legal reform should focus not just on civil society organizations' (CSOs) effort to equalize the age at 18, but also on strengthening the ability to enforce the law</li> <li>• Investments should align with the National Strategy, which offers a policy and programmatic framework directed by the government</li> <li>• Addressing social norms is essential and urgent, particularly in areas where abduction of girls for marriage is high</li> </ul>
<b>Here and Now</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burkina Faso has strong government will and an active civil society coalition on ending child marriage</li> <li>• International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) rely on community-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to combat child marriage are maximized by an effective set of stakeholders spanning national and local levels</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> The Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium was convened to facilitate coordinated action and learning among seven research, advocacy, and implementation-oriented partners. The Consortium includes: The GIRL Center at the Population Council, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, Iris Group, Fraym, the University of California San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health, and Unchained At Last.

ANALYSIS PILLAR	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<i>(e.g., current events and circumstances)</i>	<p>based organizations to implement at the local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs tend to weave together educational, economic, community engagement approaches, but not many are evaluated</li> <li>• COVID-19 has disrupted communications, programs, and monitoring related to CEFM; terrorism affects reach of programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local CSOs must be included to reach communities</li> <li>• More evaluations are needed to assess program impact</li> <li>• Post-COVID-19 programming to address CEFM will need to respond to immediate economic needs</li> <li>• There is a need to integrate CEFM efforts in humanitarian interventions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dynamics</b></p> <p><i>(e.g., interplay among the other pillars)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress:</b> Advocates have gained support from the First Lady and local leaders and government actively engages with civil society coalition; regional-level research is increasing knowledge on the norms and conditions driving child marriage disparities; diverse programs reach communities across the country.</li> <li>• <b>Obstacles:</b> Legal reform has not progressed and targets for child marriage reduction are timid; much more research is needed to identify effective approaches; programming is small-scale and difficult to expand due to inaccessibility of target communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investments in civil society groups by donors and INGOs have led to sophisticated responses to CEFM in programming and advocacy</li> <li>• Given competing priorities and potential push back from conservative actors, more advocacy must be carried out within the government so that it prioritizes the fight against the CEFM</li> <li>• Scale-up of programming would likely be costly and lose the advantages of local adaptation</li> <li>• Additional subregional and implementation research would help maximize programmatic effectiveness</li> </ul>

The findings of this PEA support the following conclusions and recommendations:

### Case for Investment

- **Burkina Faso has several crucial ingredients for success that are not currently fully engaged due to limited funding.** The government’s commitment to gender equality, the mobilization of civil society on child marriage, and experienced implementers tackling the issue are powerful factors that could contribute to moving the needle on child marriage, despite many obstacles.
- **Burkina Faso’s civil society activism on child marriage could serve as a model elsewhere.** Effective long-term, issue-based networks are rare, and an investment in examining and documenting the work of civil society coalition CONAMEB could be very helpful to civil society groups still learning how to build their voice on this issue.
- **Sparking progress in Burkina Faso could provide lessons on how to address unchanging child marriage rates.** Unlike countries that have seen rates fall, Burkina Faso has not experienced the kind of economic progress that may have triggered declines in CEFM in some countries. It could provide an important test as to whether progress can be made in a country that has the political will and experience to address the issue, but lacks macro-level economic changes.

### Key Points of Leverage in Burkina Faso on CEFM

- **The National Strategy and its Operational Plans serve as touchstones for both government and civil society.** Child marriage investments should track to this strategy and advance efforts to track progress.
- **Diverse international and civil society organizations integrate attention to child marriage in their programming, with reach into communities across the country.** INGOs have brought global lessons and funding to address the issue, and CSOs are pursuing multicomponent strategies and connecting to key influencers even in hard-to-reach areas.
- **Existing investments in Burkina Faso and constructive relationship between donors and government can be leveraged to increase prioritization of adolescent girls.** Donors can help position child marriage as a priority within a government-led gender-transformative development approach and increase the level of public funding for it.

### Turning Gaps into Opportunities

- **CEFM programs in Burkina Faso need much more and better data on CEFM generated from quantitative and qualitative research as well as program evaluations.** International and civil society organizations need better data to strengthen their strategies.
- **Investing in the capacity of civil society organizations and norms-changing programming can lay the groundwork for future gains.** Youth- and women-led organizations need additional resources to implement their plans of action, sustain themselves, monitor program progress, and weather current challenges related to COVID-19.
- **Increased engagement of religious leaders at the national level could boost social change.** Given the high rate of child marriage among Muslim communities, prominent Muslim leaders could be effective influencers.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 2020, Iris Group conducted a political economy analysis (PEA) of the issue of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Burkina Faso to contextualize the work of CEFM consortium grantees<sup>2</sup> and to offer a high-level view of the environment for CEFM programming in the country. The ultimate purpose of this analysis is to provide macro-level context for the findings from learning consortium investments.

Iris Group adapted an existing framework for applied political economy analysis from the 2018 USAID PEA Guide for Practitioners (Menocal et al., 2018) to identify the underlying context for CEFM. The team performed a desk review of grey and peer-reviewed literature and conducted five semi-structured interviews with 11 key informants on the topic. This PEA was gender-intentional, examining how Burkinabè society understands and enforces male and female roles and responsibilities, and how its political dynamics have shaped the narrative around the equal rights of women and girls. This gender intentional focus was incorporated into our interview guide for key informants and our analysis of the findings.

Iris Group assessed the findings using four angles of analysis:

- **Foundational Factors:** Embedded structures that are difficult or impossible to change, such as geography, class, ethnicity, gender inequality
- **Rules of the Game:** Laws, international commitments, policies, and social norms
- **Here and Now:** Current events and circumstances
- **Dynamics:** Interplay among the other pillars

This report presents the CEFM context in Burkina Faso, summarizes the findings within each pillar of analysis from the desk review and interviews, and provides recommendations based on these findings for potential responses to CEFM in Burkina Faso.

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> The Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium was convened to facilitate coordinated action and learning among seven research, advocacy, and implementation-oriented partners. The Consortium includes: The GIRL Center at the Population Council, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, Iris Group, Fraym, the University of California San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health, and Unchained At Last.

### III. CONTEXT

Landlocked and with limited natural resources, Burkina Faso faces substantial development challenges. In 2019, their GNI per capita was \$790, among the lowest of the globe's 29 remaining low-income economies (World Bank, 2020a). Close to 80% of the working population is employed in an unstable agricultural industry and 40.1% live below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2020a). With the country facing dual-crises of COVID-19 and massive internal displacement due to conflict, a total of 3.3 million people are facing acute food insecurity and need emergency humanitarian aid (OCHA, 2021; World Food Programme, 2020). This is expected to exacerbate an already challenging development landscape for children, where one-quarter of children under 5 are stunted and under five mortality affects just under 1/10 of all children, at a rate of 91 per 1,000 births (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Since its independence in 1960, the country has been marred by a long succession of coups. In 2014, civil unrest began when President Blaise Compaoré tried to continue his 27-year reign, and resulted in his exile and a transitional government. A year later, military supporters of Compaoré installed a junta, but protests and international pressure brought a restoration of the transitional government just one week later. Elections later that year were viewed by the U.S. State Department as "free and fair." Since 2017, non-state armed groups have gained a foothold in the north leading to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with over 1 million Burkinabè internally displaced (IOM, 2020; UNHCR, 2020).

Burkina Faso is notable among the countries of West and Central Africa for both its high rate of child marriage and its lack of progress in decreasing the practice. According to the 2010 DHS, child marriage among 20-24 year-old women was 51.6 percent (Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie (INSD) et al., 2012). Mid-decade, MICS/EMC data showed a very slight decline to 51.3 percent (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). Older women report almost the same rates of first union before 18 as this younger cohort, indicating that the overall child marriage rate has remained stagnant over decades (Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, 2019). Under-15 marriage declined slightly at the national level from 2010 to 2015 from 10.2 to 8.9 percent, although increases in the Center North and Center South regions offset progress in Sahel (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019).

## IV. FINDINGS

### A. Foundational Factors

This section explores embedded or fixed structures that affect CEFM. Embedded structures are those that do not quickly change, and should be considered as constants in any CEFM strategy. The table below summarizes the key findings that are explored in this section, and implications of these findings for CEFM strategy.

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child marriage is highest in the Sahel; girls in rural areas are more susceptible to be married before 18</li> <li>• Child marriage is highest among the poorest families, and rates only drop below 50% in the richest quintile</li> <li>• Rates of under-18 and under-15 marriage are highest in Muslim and traditional/animist religious groups</li> <li>• Regional disparities in gender equality generally track to child marriage rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to education, health services, and employment (as in urban areas) can contribute to lower child marriage rates</li> <li>• Anti-poverty efforts may alleviate child marriage somewhat, but not eliminate it</li> <li>• High rates among Muslim families suggest that engaging religious leaders is a critical approach</li> <li>• Gender discrimination and gender norms must also be addressed to lower child marriage rates</li> </ul>

Child marriage varies significantly in Burkina Faso depending on geographical location, with a particularly pronounced division between urban and rural areas. The Sahel region has the highest rate of under-18 marriage at 76 percent (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). Median age at first marriage for girls/women ranges from 16.1 in the more rural Sahel to 19.4 in the more urban center of the country (Ministere de l'Action Sociale et de la Solidarité, 2015). A study focused on the Sahel region found that both girls and boys in rural areas marry young, with an average age of first union of 15 for girls and 16 for boys (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016). Child marriage is just under 20 percent in urban areas, compared to 63 percent in rural areas. Ouagadougou's rate is the lowest in the country, at 13 percent (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). Several informants mentioned urban/rural disparities in child marriage rates, attributing these differences to access to secondary school,

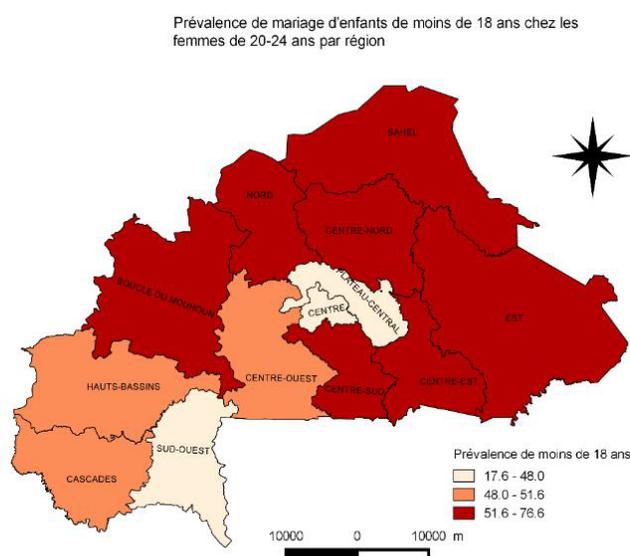


Figure 1. Under-18 Child marriage rates. UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019

sexual and reproductive health programs, and information about the harms of child marriage, as well as social norms (Interviews, 10/28a, 10/28b, 11/4a).

Economic class affects child marriage rates as well. One in five girls in the richest quintile of Burkina Faso society are married before 18, while half of girls in the next richest quintile marry as children. Among the poorest, child marriage is the norm, with seven in ten married before 18 and one in seven married before 15 (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019).

Child marriage is highest (67 percent) among those practicing traditional or animist religions in Burkina Faso, although these religions make up only 15 percent of the population (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). Burkina Faso is approximately 60 percent Muslim, and child marriage rates among Muslims are 57 percent (under age 18) and 10 percent (under age 15). Among Catholics, rates are 34 percent and 4 percent, respectively, and 36 percent and 8 percent among Protestants (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). One informant said, “Honor in the family is preserved through the practice of child marriage, especially in the Muslim community” (Interview, 11/4a). Another noted that the belief that girls should get married as soon as they begin menstruating is particularly prevalent among some Muslims (Interview, 11/4b).

The government has committed to addressing gender inequality, but longstanding discrimination affects women and girls daily, contributing to child marriage. Women hold just 14 (9%) of the National Assembly’s 127 seats, and Burkina Faso ranks 129<sup>th</sup> out of 153 countries on gender equality (Mednick, 2020a). The OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index found very high levels of gender discrimination in Sahel, consistent with the region’s high child marriage rate. Other regions – such as Nord, Centre Nord and Boucle du Mouhoun, have high levels of discrimination along with elevated child marriage rates (Sahel and West Africa Club, OECD, 2018).

## B. Rules of the Game

This section explores Burkina Faso’s formal and informal rules regulating individual, community, and government actions related to CEFM, which include national laws and policies, international commitments, and social norms. Key findings explored in this section and their implications for CEFM strategy are:

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal marriage begins at 17 for girls/women and 20 for boys/men; easily circumvented due to weak enforcement, loopholes, and exemptions granted by the Code for Persons and the Family</li> <li>• A National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage was adopted in 2015</li> <li>• Relevant social and gender norms include: marriage to seal family alliances; polygamy; female genital mutilation (FGM); taboos around premarital sex, pregnancy before marriage, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy for legal reform should focus not just on civil society organizations’ (CSOs) effort to equalize the age at 18, but also on strengthening the ability to enforce the law</li> <li>• Investments should align with the National Strategy, which offers a policy and programmatic framework directed by the government</li> <li>• Addressing social norms is essential and urgent, particularly in areas where abduction of girls for marriage is high</li> </ul>

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social norms carry more weight over individual behavior than laws in rural areas</li> </ul>	

Burkina Faso’s government has ratified international agreements relevant to gender equality and child marriage, but has yet to reform its laws on legal age of marriage in accordance with the African Charter and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Amnesty International, 2016). The Code for Persons and the Family (1990) establishes legal ages of marriage for males (20) and females (17) (Amnesty International, 2016). The code allows girls to be married at 15 if a court agrees and both partners consent (Code Des Personnes et de La Famille, 1989). However, marriage laws only apply to civilly registered marriages – not traditional or religious marriages, which are much more common (Amnesty International, 2016). Women and men have equal rights under the law to enter marriage (*Burkina Faso Constitution Du 11 Juin 1991 (Version Du 11 Juin 2012)*, 2012). While informants said there is broad knowledge of the law among local authorities and communities, “the law isn’t strongly affecting the behavior of people” (Interview, 11/4a). A study in Sahel found that half of adolescents did not know the legal age of marriage, and only 7 percent knew about legal remedies to child marriage (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016).

In 2015, the government enacted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage, which is designed to be used by all stakeholders and actors working on child marriage (Sidibé, 2016). Its operational plan was funded by international donors, including UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Canadian government. It was the first such strategy in the region (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Both the strategy and plan were developed through a series of workshops in 2014-15 with representatives of different ministries, civil society, international donors, and experts (Ministere de l’Action Sociale et de la Solidarité, 2015).

Social and gender norms vary by ethnicity and religion in Burkina Faso, and have a strong bearing on child marriage practices. In rural areas, “civil law often holds little influence” especially in relation to the rights of women and girls (Brady et al., 2007). The refusal to accept norms relating to marriage is often sanctioned with threats of violence or shame (Amnesty International, 2016). Marriage is seen as “a form of social protection for young girls and a religious prescription for both sexes” (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016). Some of the common norms and customs described in the literature and by informants include:

“In traditional populations, we cannot go against a social norm; rather, we go against a law.”  
 – Interview, 11/4b

- **Harmful practices** grounded in gender inequality are prevalent, including FGM and polygamy. FGM affects 68 percent of Bukinabè women, though rates among 15-17 year old girls decreased from 54.2% in 2010 to 38.7% in 2015 (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2019). Polygamy affects 42 percent of women in Burkina Faso, primarily in rural areas.
- **Cultural marriage traditions** sustain child marriage practices including *Litho* – the practice of exchanging girls, often pledging them when they are born – and *Pog-lenga*

– bringing the niece of the bride as a gift to a family member of the groom (Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, 2019).

- **Abduction** of girls for marriage appears to be common, especially in the East region. These include:
  - Forcible abduction of a girl without her consent or the consent or knowledge of her parents;
  - Parental abduction, when the parents assist a boy or man to abduct their daughter without her consent, generally for purposes of family honor (Interview, 11/4a)
- **“Consensual” child marriage made to look like abduction** was also mentioned by informants, although prevalence is not clear. This includes when a girl and her boyfriend run away to escape an arranged or forced marriage; or, simulation of abduction when the girl is close to 17 and consents to marriage (Interview 11/4a)
- **Marriage between cousins** is very common in the Sahel region, especially among the Fulani. According to a study in the region, 66 percent of marriages are between cousins, and “marriage is celebrated from the time the girls is in the cradle” (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016). An informant concurred, saying Sahel’s high rates are due to “the importance of family and consolidating families early on,” with girls promised for marriage “sometimes even before a woman gives birth to her daughter” (Interview, 10/28b).
- **Taboos against premarital female sexuality** limit access to contraception for unmarried youth and build pressure for marriage as soon as a girl reaches puberty, especially among Muslims (Amnesty International, 2016; Initiatives Conseil International, 2016); Interview, 10/28b).

### C. Here and Now

This section examines the current state of affairs surrounding CEFM in Burkina Faso, describing stakeholders, assessing strategic links to related issues, and gauging the impact of COVID-19. The most relevant factors in the *here and now*, and their implications for CEFM strategy, are:

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burkina Faso has strong government will and an active civil society coalition on ending child marriage</li> <li>• International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) rely on community-based organizations to implement at the local level</li> <li>• Programs tend to weave together educational, economic, community engagement approaches, but not many are evaluated</li> <li>• COVID-19 has disrupted communications, programs, and monitoring related to CEFM; terrorism affects reach of programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to combat child marriage are maximized by an effective set of stakeholders spanning national and local levels</li> <li>• Local CSOs must be included to reach communities</li> <li>• More evaluations are needed to assess program impact</li> <li>• Post-COVID-19 programming to address CEFM will need to respond to immediate economic needs</li> </ul>

CEFM Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
Federal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage in 2015 with a participatory process (Sahel and West Africa Club, OECD, 2018; Sidibé, 2016); Strategy commits to 20% reduction in child marriage by 2025 (Sidibé, 2016)</li> <li>Adopted and implemented operational plans of action in line with the National Strategy</li> <li>First Lady Bella Sika Kaboré is “a champion against child marriage and for female education” (Interview, 11/4b); In 2017, she convened a meeting with ministers on child marriage, and advocated for a change in legal age to 18 for boys and girls (Girls Not Brides, n.d.)</li> <li>Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, and the Family is responsible for child protection; includes a technical directorate that manages the strategy, with operational plans every 3 years (Sidibé, 2016)</li> <li>Ministry of Justice “is supposed to draft and adopt regulations supported by the national assembly but the minister who drafts it has to face religious tension and traditional backlash” especially with Muslim communities on age of marriage (Interview, 11/4)</li> <li>Ministry of Health has improved access to family planning against opposition of Catholic Church (Interview 11/3)</li> </ul>
Province/Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry has operational structures in all 45 provinces that are “relay nuclei for communities to denounce practices in rural areas” (Sidibé, 2016)</li> <li>Child protection networks: quasi-governmental, led by deputy prosecutor or their deputy and coordinated by CSOs and social workers (Interview 11/4b)</li> </ul>
Private, Bilateral and Multilateral Donors (partial list)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UNICEF and UNFPA supported development of the National Strategy through the Global Programme; support coordination through a multisectoral platform and a national coalition; both focus on child marriage in their ongoing work</li> <li>World Bank supports girls’ empowerment and access to reproductive health services in Sahel through SWEDD investment (World Bank, 2020b)</li> <li>Canada and GIZ supported the 2016-2018 National Strategy Operational Plan (Sidibé, 2016); Netherlands supports through She Decides (Interview, 10/28a)</li> <li>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation has MOU to support the government’s development plan; support for president’s priority gender-transformative human capital development plan; health investments at high level to promote ministerial coordination, health data systems (Interview, 11/3); also supports family planning projects that target adolescents (Pathfinder International, n.d.; Pathfinder International et al., 2020)</li> <li>ECOWAS is conducting an analysis on cost of gender inequality (Interview, 11/3)</li> </ul>
International Non-Governmental Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population Council conducted implementation research on four-pronged intervention based on similar interventions in Tanzania and Ethiopia (Erulkar et al., 2017)</li> <li>Plan International and The Hunger Project participate in CONAMEB (see below) and are active on child marriage in Burkina Faso. Plan also has supported the Operational Plan (Sidibé, 2016)</li> </ul>

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amnesty International issued a report to the UN Human Rights Committee in 2016 on forced/early marriage and sexual and reproductive rights (Amnesty International, 2016)</li> <li>• Oxfam and Save the Children International also work on child marriage and with the coalition and National Strategy (Interview 10/28a)</li> <li>• “INGOs are not very close to the community. They often cannot go to the field, so they engage local NGOS” (Interview, 11/4a)</li> </ul>
Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Coalition against Child Marriage in Burkina (CONAMEB) began its activities in 2013; 67 member organizations across 45 provinces; headed by local NGOs; became a Girls Not Brides National Partnership in 2019; includes 5 working groups (Girls Not Brides, n.d.)</li> <li>• NGOs and CSO are active at the regional level, working with local authorities and traditional/religious leaders to advocate on child marriage and raise awareness among parents and adolescents (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016)</li> <li>• “People don’t give CSOs enough money;” difficulty accessing resources due to many donors’ English-only application processes (Interview, 11/3)</li> </ul>
Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islamic associations have grown in influence; women have gained influence in them; a female preacher has a radio program against forced marriage (Gomez-Perez, 2016)</li> <li>• East region has a Catholic organization that works on child marriage (Interview, 11/4a)</li> </ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSOs use TV and radio programs to promote women’s rights and combat CEFM. Expands reach into inaccessible areas (Interview, 11/4a)</li> <li>• UNICEF and its Goodwill Ambassadors, First Lady, and Ministry of Education launched media campaign in 2019 that has reached more than 1 million people (UNICEF, 2019)</li> </ul>
Individual Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Traditional leaders are also critical actors because cultural beliefs and norms are the main causes of CEFM in some regions, such as Sahel” (Interview, 11/4b)</li> </ul>

### Strategic Links with Other Issues

There appear to be few evaluated programmatic approaches to combatting CEFM in Burkina Faso, but education access, economic support, access to family planning/reproductive health, and social norms change are common approaches, based on informant interviews and literature. Interventions mentioned by informants often addressed multiple areas simultaneously. For example, Population Council’s evaluated child marriage intervention (based on its Berhane Hewan project in Ethiopia) tested a multi-component approach in the Cascades region of Burkina Faso that included four arms: community dialogue, education promotion, conditional asset transfer, and a comprehensive model (Erulkar et al., 2017).

	Opportunities	Challenges
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education at secondary level tracks with decreased child marriage (Brady et al., 2007)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population Council’s findings suggest that economic incentives alone may not improve school attendance (Erulkar et al., 2017)</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Strategy’s first 3-year Operational Plan focused on keeping girls in school</li> <li>• Global Programme supports programs on menstrual hygiene and decreasing GBV in schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorist attacks against schools are common (Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, 2019)</li> <li>• Secondary education enrollment is low for both boys and girls, particularly upper secondary (FHI 360, 2018)</li> </ul>
<p>Economic Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan International works on “economic competence” of young girls to try to alleviate family poverty (Interview 10/28b)</li> <li>• Income-generating activities for young people are among strategies used by actors, including in the Sahel “to occupy young people” (Initiatives Conseil International, 2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic approaches do not appear to have been evaluated</li> <li>• Population Council asset transfer arm could not be compared to control site; not included in evaluation results (Erulkar et al., 2017)</li> </ul>
<p>Gender Norms and Empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population Council’s community dialogue arm decreased likelihood of being married by two-thirds, and parents reported highest ideal age of marriage (17.4) of the four arms (Erulkar et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Promotion of girls’ and women’s rights through radio and TV programs can reach inaccessible areas (Interview, 11/4a)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In areas that have long-standing traditions on child marriage, may be harder to shift relevant gender norms</li> <li>• Possibility of backlash from traditional/religious actors</li> </ul>
<p>Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnancy “may be a cause of marriage for girls” as single pregnant girls are married off (Interview 10/28b)</li> <li>• Ministry of Health has supported access to reproductive health and family planning services (Interview, 11/3)</li> <li>• Contraceptive prevalence is rising, but still low (27% of all women of reproductive age) (FP2020, 2018)</li> <li>• Pathfinder’s work to reduce barriers to family planning for adolescents and reduce provider bias (Pathfinder International, n.d.; Pathfinder International et al., 2020)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic Church has been resistant to expanded family planning access (Interview, 11/3); other religious backlash is possible</li> <li>• Unrest is making access to SRH services more difficult (Mednick, 2020b)</li> </ul>
<p>Child Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child protection committees have been set up across the country</li> <li>• Security forces have also intervened on violence against children, equipped to carry out rescues (11/4a)</li> <li>• Interventions at the community level are integrated, making it possible to address</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committees cannot always access communities where risk is high due to terrorism and instability (Interview, 11/4b)</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Challenges
several issues related to violence and harmful practices	

### Effects of COVID-19 and Recent Events on CEFM

There is not clear data yet about the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage in Burkina Faso, but informants agree that communications, economic, and programming disruptions may increase child marriages in the medium to long term. One informant thought that COVID-19 has reduced child marriage for the time being “because people are confined” (Interview, 10/28a). A Plan and Girls Not Brides report on COVID-19’s impact on child marriage in West and Central Africa found that access to food, education, livelihoods, and health care was endangered, and speculated that school closures would deprive girls of a protective environment (Girls Not Brides & Plan International, 2020). At the same time, the existing gender data gap made it more difficult to assess the impact of COVID-19 on women (Mednick, 2020a).

Informants noted creative means to adjust, such as equipping communities with tools to continue programming locally. Challenges with communication and monitoring left NGOs without a clear sense of how well this was working (Interview, 10/28a). Other informants expressed concern that girls returning home from schools would face abductions “without many people noticing their disappearance or having the ability to travel to find their children because of the lockdown” (Interview, 11/4b). Advocacy efforts have also been stymied by limits of public gatherings to 25 people or fewer (Interview, 11/4b).

Armed violence and ethnic-based violence in recent years have also affected CEFM, limiting access to communities, closing schools, and making it more difficult to find abducted girls (Interview, 11/4b). One informant said that in areas concentrated with internally displaced populations, “students drop out or leave school early, mostly girls, who then find themselves in shelter communities” and are married off “because there are too many mouths to feed” (Interview, 10/28b). During crises, some vulnerable populations use negative coping strategies like survival sex, child marriage, and sexual exploitation (OCHA, 2020).

### D. Dynamics

This section analyzes the interactions among the previous three pillars of PEA analysis (Foundational Factors, Rules of the Game, and Here and Now). In the areas of **advocacy, research, and programming**, we assess where and how progress on CEFM in Burkina Faso has evolved, and where the literature and informants identified threats and obstacles to progress.

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress:</b> Advocates have gained support from the First Lady and local leaders and government actively engages with civil society coalition; regional-level research is increasing knowledge on the norms and conditions driving child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investments in civil society groups by donors and INGOs have led to sophisticated responses to CEFM in programming and advocacy</li> <li>• Given competing priorities and potential push back from conservative actors,</li> </ul>

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<p>marriage disparities; diverse programs reach communities across the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Obstacles:</b> Legal reform has not progressed and targets for child marriage reduction are timid; much more research is needed to identify effective approaches; programming is small-scale and difficult to expand due to inaccessibility of target communities.</li> </ul>	<p>government needs additional incentives to prioritize CEFM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale-up of programming would likely be costly and lose the advantages of local adaptation</li> <li>• Additional subregional and implementation research would help maximize programmatic effectiveness</li> </ul>

**Areas of Progress**

**Advocacy** efforts appear to have benefited substantially from CONAMEB’s work since its formation in 2013. While it has not won legal reform to equalize the age of marriage at 18, it has successfully gained the support of influencers from the First Lady – who has supported legal reform – to local officials – who have committed budget support to ending child marriage (Interview, 11/4b). The coalition has won press coverage and held workshops on child marriage for journalists and political officials (Kindo, 2017). CONAMEB’s working group structure and high level of participation in the coalition – with international NGOs participating with the leadership of Burkinabè CSOs – suggests a well-functioning network able to strategically pursue key advocacy outcomes. The government’s willingness to make commitments and engage with civil society on gender issues, and specifically on child marriage, facilitates policy progress. The development of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage with the active participation of a range of stakeholders helped pave the way for continued collaboration and shared commitment on the strategy’s Operational Plan (Sidibé, 2016).

Advancements in **research** have helped implementers and advocates better understand the shape of CEFM in Burkina Faso’s regions. A 2016 study on child marriage supported by UNICEF in Sahel illuminated the social norms and embedded traditions that have made progress in those regions so challenging. An informant commented, “Data informs action...the program cannot be the same in all regions” (Interview, 11/4a). Population Council’s evaluation of its intervention in the Cascades region provided important insights on the effectiveness of community engagement. It included a cost analysis, finding “it is possible to implement simple, cost-contained interventions to prevent child marriage and promote schooling” (Erulkar et al., 2020). While the last available DHS data is from 2010, a report based on the 2015 multi-indicator continuous survey (MICS) has provided more recent data on child marriage rates, as well as FGM (Interview, 11/4b).

Anti-CEFM **programming** in Burkina Faso is implemented by government, INGOs, and CSOs with the support of international donors. Programs include community mobilization, livelihood training, sexual and reproductive health education and services, school promotion, community education, child protection networks and engagement of local religious and traditional leaders. Several informants mentioned that they intertwine these different approaches in the same communities, adapting their programs to local contexts. Population Council’s evaluated approach found that its community dialogue arm was more effective at reducing the likelihood

of marriage, changing parental expectations around ideal age of marriage, and keeping girls in school than its school incentives or comprehensive approach (Erulkar et al., 2017).

### Obstacles to Progress

**Advocacy** progress has been hindered by religious messaging on marriage and traditional values. While no informants or articles mentioned organized opposition to raising the age of marriage, one informant said the Minister of Justice faced backlash from Muslim communities on age of marriage, which may be why the National Assembly has failed to enact legal reform (Interview, 11/4b). The government also seems reluctant to set ambitious targets for child marriage reduction, with its first target of 20 percent reduction by 2025 seen as “too low,” in the words of one informant, and certainly not on track to reach elimination by the Sustainable Development Goal target date of 2030 (Interview, 10/28a).

While **research** in Burkina Faso’s regions has helped implementers understand local contexts, there is not enough subregional data or program evaluations to reliably underpin evidence-based interventions. Informants suggested that lack of resources was a major factor, as one informant said, “we lack the data to know where the problems are and to what extent they are being addressed” (Interview, 10/28b). Another said, “In Burkina, there are not a lot of studies that have been done, or the studies are very old. We need research because it is important, but it is expensive compared to investing in programming” (Interview 10/28b). Additional resources for program evaluations would allow Burkina Faso’s plentiful and experienced implementers to improve their strategic approaches. Data collection also has suffered from the country’s unrest. Building trust with communities in conflict areas and identifying women data collectors is a particular challenge for international organizations. For example, CARE has been working in Burkina Faso since 2017, but has not been able to collect primary gender data (Mednick, 2020a).

Armed violence, internal displacement, and COVID-19 all weigh heavily on chances of **programming** success in Burkina Faso. All child marriage programs are small-scale, which

“We need to figure out how to take risks, be nimble, and invest in local organizations.”

– Interview, 11/3

allows them to be adapted to local context, but limits reach, especially given that those in most urgent need of anti-CEFM efforts are in rural, less accessible areas. In its evaluation, Population Council found that reaching a large number of girls with comprehensive programming was challenging, “likely reflecting the increased difficulty in implementing complex, multicomponent programs, exacerbated by the fact that interventions are being implemented in remote rural areas where households are dispersed, isolated, or inaccessible” (Erulkar et al., 2020). They concluded that scale and complexity are unlikely to be achieved simultaneously, because “in remote areas, complexity is hard to sustain with quality” (Erulkar et al., 2020). At the same time, Burkina Faso’s programs are under-resourced. According to one informant, this is because “there isn’t enough funding for the Francophone ecosystem” and the country’s CSOs are relatively young (Interview, 11/3).

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this PEA support the following conclusions and recommendations:

### A. What is the case for investment in CEFM in Burkina Faso?

- **Burkina Faso has several crucial ingredients for success that are not currently fully engaged due to limited funding.** The government's commitment to gender equality, the mobilization of civil society on child marriage, and experienced implementers tackling the issue are powerful factors that could contribute to moving the needle on child marriage, despite many obstacles. Further investment could help the government prioritize child marriage within its development plans and encourage more a more ambitious set of targets on the issue.
- **Burkina Faso's civil society activism on child marriage could serve as a model elsewhere.** CONAMEB, Burkina's civil society coalition on child marriage, has strong leadership by Burkinabè organizations, active technical working groups, targeted activities, and a disciplined message. Effective long-term, issue-based networks are rare, and an investment in examining and documenting CONAMEB's work could be very helpful to civil society groups still learning how to build their voice on this issue.
- **Sparking progress in Burkina Faso could provide lessons on how to address unchanging child marriage rates.** Child marriage in Burkina Faso bears some of the same hallmarks as other countries, with high rural rates, poverty, and gender norms as primary drivers. But unlike countries that have seen rates fall, the country has not experienced the kind of economic progress that may have triggered declines in CEFM in some countries. It could provide an important test as to whether progress can be made in a country that has the political will and experience to address the issue, but lacks macro-level economic changes.

### B. Where are the key points of leverage on CEFM in Burkina Faso?

- **The National Strategy and its Operational Plans serve as touchstones for both government and civil society.** The National Strategy provides a framework for stakeholders to coordinate and monitor their efforts, and a benchmark to reduce CEFM 20 percent by 2025. While it is supported by international actors, it benefits from Burkinabè ownership. Child marriage investments should track to this strategy and advance efforts to track progress.
- **Diverse international and civil society organizations integrate attention to child marriage in their programming, with reach into communities across the country.** INGOs such as Population Council, Plan, The Hunger Project, Save the Children International and Pathfinder have brought global lessons and funding to address the issue, and worked with local groups to reach affected communities. While civil society is relatively young, CSOs are pursuing multicomponent strategies and connecting to key influencers even in hard-to-reach areas.
- **Existing investments in Burkina Faso and constructive relationships between donors and government can be leveraged to increase prioritization of adolescent girls.** Donors have been working with the government to support a gender transformative human capital

development plan post-COVID-19, and have invested in family planning programs for adolescents. Adolescent girls are critical to future economic development in Burkina Faso, and tackling social norms is key to gender equality. Donors can help position child marriage as a priority within a government-led gender-transformative development approach.

### C. Where can investment/influence turn gaps into opportunities?

- **CEFM programs in Burkina Faso need much more and better data on CEFM generated from quantitative and qualitative research as well as program evaluations.** International and civil society organizations have long struggled with getting the data they need to strengthen their strategies. More and more reliable subregional and qualitative data is needed overall. Investment in subregional data collection should examine, for example, why under-15 marriage appears to be rising in some regions and falling in others. There is little information about the impact of polygamy on child marriage. Most organizations appear to be combining approaches, promoting schooling, economic empowerment, sexual health, community engagement, and girls' rights simultaneously – yet they don't have clear evidence on what interventions are most effective.
- **Investing in the capacity of civil society organizations and norms-changing programming can lay the groundwork for future gains.** Youth- and women-led organizations are prominent in advocacy and program implementation, and Burkinabè organizations should continue to serve as leaders of the anti-CEFM movement. They will need additional resources to sustain themselves, monitor program progress, and weather current challenges related to COVID-19. With their connections to and experience in affected communities, these groups are well positioned to implement initiatives that challenge the social norms underpinning CEFM.
- **Increased engagement of religious leaders at the national level could boost social change.** Groups have engaged with religious leaders at a local level, but it is unclear whether there are national-level attempts to win support for ending CEFM among religious leaders. Other countries have supported cross-national meetings to shift perceptions on child marriage, particularly among Imams. Given the high rate of child marriage among Muslim communities, prominent Muslim leaders could be effective influencers.

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## APPENDIX A. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)

### KII Interview Guide – Burkina Faso

**Introduction:** *Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. Iris Group is conducting Political Economy Analyses on Child, Early and Forced Marriage. Our purpose is to develop a high-level analysis of the CEFM context in each of eight countries. You have been recommended as an expert in Burkina Faso on this issue, and we greatly appreciate your input in this process. Your responses will help shape a contextual understanding of CEFM in Burkina Faso, which in turn will contribute to recommended responses. Your specific responses will not be attributed to you without your consent. We are very grateful for your honest responses.*

First, can you give me a brief summary of your work in Burkina Faso related to CEFM?

#### Foundational Factors

From what you know based on your work or experiences, what are the most important factors driving **regional differences** in CEFM in Burkina Faso? (probe for geographical, environmental differences)

In what ways, if any, does **economic class** influence CEFM rates and practices in Burkina Faso?

How have **ethnic differences** shaped CM and other gender issues in Burkina Faso? Do different regions track to different cultural values and/or ethnicities?

How has historical gender inequality affected CEFM?

#### Rules of the Game

How does Burkina Faso law affect CEFM?

How do international commitments affect laws or policy in Burkina Faso on CEFM?

What are the most common social norms related to CEFM? How much do these differ among different ethnic groups?

Have there been **any recent norms changes** related to gender, fertility desires, familial responsibility and sexual debut? Have these been reflected in CM rates?

### Here and Now

Who are the **key stakeholders and actors on CEFM**? (probe for donors, CSOs, policymakers, advocates)? Are there any outstanding champions on this?

What role do women's rights and youth groups play on the issue in Burkina Faso?

What influence do **international NGOs, institutions and donors** have on CEFM in Burkina Faso?

What are the limitations of their influence?

Is CEFM progress **driven mainly by actors outside Burkina Faso or inside Burkina Faso**? Is there tension between external and internal actors? Do communities see it as a domestically-driven issue?

What role does **media** in Burkina Faso play in CEFM?

**Is CEFM linked with other issues** at the national level (e.g. education, economics, sexual rights and reproductive health, HIV, HTP etc.) or addressed as a separate issue? What are the advantages and disadvantages of working on CEFM through these lenses?

How do you think **COVID-19** affects CEFM and efforts to combat it?

What **global, regional or national events** have been important to CEFM in Burkina Faso in the past couple years?

### **Dynamics**

Where are the gaps (in programming, research, advocacy)? Where can these gaps be converted into opportunities?

What **progress** has been made on CEFM in Burkina Faso? (*probe for programmatic, research, advocacy*)

What and who are the **biggest obstacles** for current CEFM efforts in Burkina Faso? (*probe for programmatic, research and advocacy challenges*) Have these changed over time?

Is there anyone else you think it's important for me to speak to about this issue? Are there any materials you can share that might help us understand these contextual issues better?