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CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE: A Political Economy Analysis of Ethiopia

July 2020



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 Ethiopia to contextualize the work of the Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium¹ 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
Foundational Factors <i>(e.g., embedded structures, such as geography, class, ethnicity)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional differences shape prevalence and specific drivers for child marriage At the national level, child marriage prevalence declines in upper economic quintiles, but in some regions, richer girls get married at younger ages than poorer girls Orthodox Christian and Muslim religious groups both have perpetuated child marriage, although with different characteristics Systemic gender inequality has excluded women from decision-making power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban areas need less emphasis, as child marriage prevalence has declined significantly in cities Sub-regional hotspots require contextualized responses that address local drivers Interventions addressing poverty may work in some places, but will be less effective in others, as economic class is not a universal driver of child marriage across the country
Rules of the Game <i>(e.g., laws, international commitments, policies, social norms)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethiopian law criminalizes child marriage under 18 for boys and girls; includes sanctions on those involved in brokering the marriage Laws are not evenly enforced or obeyed Ethiopia’s federal government has committed to end child marriage through international agreements Social norms are strong drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia; regionally and sub-regionally varied Girls may be “choosing” marriage more in recent years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethiopian laws and policies on child marriage have increased chances to end/delay marriage Norms and fear of adolescent sexuality provide parents with incentives to evade the law Improved enforcement of child marriage laws requires norms changes among community leaders, officials, judges Rise in “voluntary” child marriage reflects girls’ increasing autonomy, lack of alternatives
Here and Now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government is the primary actor on child marriage programs through Ministries, regional bodies, and Women’s Development Army, National Alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders can take complementary roles in accelerating progress on reducing child marriage, but it would take significant investment and capacity building

¹ 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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have made important headway, but not at scale; civil society less prominent on child marriage • Programs approach child marriage with combination of educational, economic, and norms-based interventions, less on rights-based • Both boys and girls are vulnerable to marriage now, as COVID-19 gives parents the opportunity to arrange marriages without teachers reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the community level, local officials, religious leaders, parents, and older sisters are critical influencers • Current programs challenge gender norms but tend not to assert girls' rights • COVID-19 threatens to reverse progress on CEFM, with children out of school and programs delayed; conflict also a risk to gains
Dynamics <i>(e.g., interplay among the other pillars)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases in child marriage rates since 1980 may have been driven by economic and schooling gains; they mask stagnation or increases in regional/subregional hotspots • Sub-regional data can be difficult to derive from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data, which is reported regionally • Programs tend to be small scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopia's advantages on tackling CEFM include a committed and effective government, strong laws, experienced implementing organizations, and communities receptive to protecting girls • Challenges that remain include focused data collection in hotspots, finding balance between scalability and local responsiveness, reaching inaccessible communities and out-of-school girls.

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

Case for Investment

- **Ethiopia is at a potential turning point.** Economic growth and increased investment in schooling have helped drive down child marriage prevalence rates in the past 40 years, but progress has not been universal and may be fragile. Investment at this urgent moment can help stem regression in a country seen by many as a global CEFM success story.
- **Ethiopia has important ingredients for success but needs more resources.** Ethiopia is equipped with experienced donors and partners and an evidence-based roadmap for continued progress but does not have the resources for massive CEFM interventions at scale.
- **Donors have existing successful investments on child marriage in Ethiopia (such as CARE's Abidorou and Pathfinder's Act with Her) and relationships with stakeholders.** Donors' presence in Ethiopia and relationships with the Ethiopian government and implementing organizations enhance their influence on this issue.

Key Points of Leverage in Ethiopia on CEFM

- **The Ethiopian government has extensive reach and commitment.** The government wants to be seen as making progress on this issue and has extensive tools at its disposal.
- **Robust research provides insights not only about where, but also about how to address different types of CEFM.** Sub-regional data can identify broader trends that may require urgency – such as areas where girls risk violence if they resist CEFM – or a shift in focus – such as areas where girls are “choosing” marriage against their parents’ wishes.

Turning Gaps into Opportunities

- **More information on economic drivers can help promote responses in areas where CEFM is driven by aspiration instead of desperation.** The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) may be effective in reducing child marriage among households that are chronically poor but leave out girls (and boys) whose families aren’t destitute but have dismal chances for economic advancement.
- **Gaps in data should be filled with sentinel sites and more frequent monitoring.** Analyzing sub-regional data in Ethiopia was tremendously important for programmatic responses in Ethiopia. Regional monitoring and evaluation through the government and sentinel sites can provide more frequent data on CEFM trends and characteristics.
- **Programs should become more sophisticated in addressing specific types of CEFM.** While certain methodologies can be adapted to any context, project design should identify the type of CEFM in the target area and the theory of change should demonstrate how it will address the norms and incentives that drive that type of marriage.
- **Women-led civil society organizations can play an important role in CEFM reduction.** With the change in laws restricting civil society organizations (CSOs) from advocacy activities, there is an opportunity to seed girls’ and women’s grassroots organizing to keep momentum at a local level, while building the capacity of national women’s groups to ensure government accountability to its commitments on gender and rights.

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 Ethiopia to contextualize the work of the Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium² 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 eight semi-structured interviews with ten key informants on the topic. This PEA was gender-intentional, examining how Ethiopian society understands and enforces male and female roles and responsibilities, and how Ethiopian 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 Ethiopia, 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 Ethiopia.

² 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.

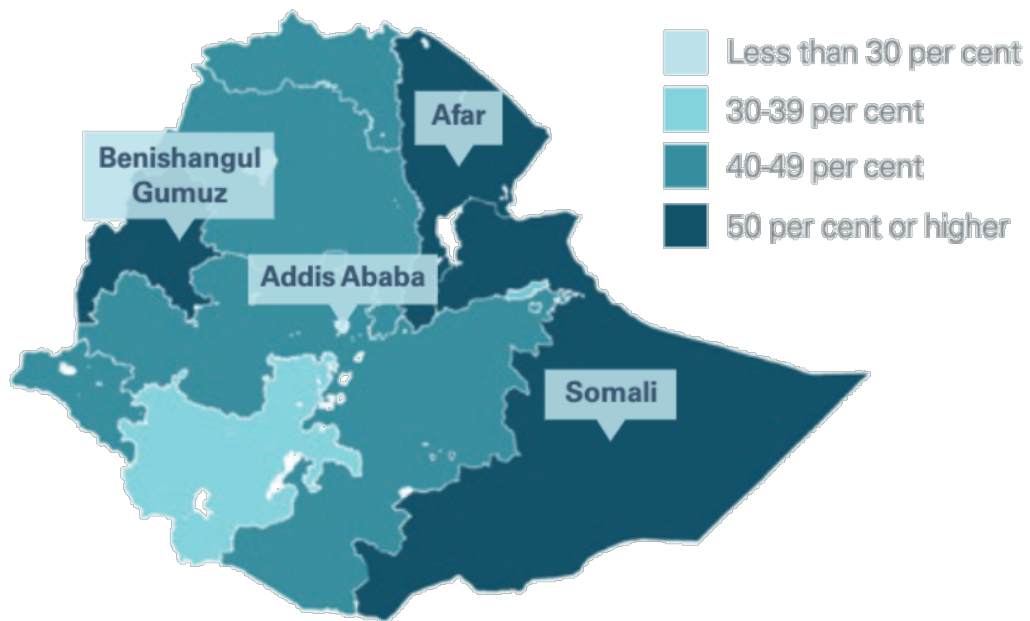
III. CONTEXT

Ethiopia's government aspires to be a middle-income country by 2025, and positions ending child marriage as contributing to that goal (The World Bank, 2019; Interview, 7/1). From 2000 to 2016, Ethiopia made significant economic progress, as the third fastest growing economy among countries with more than 10 million people (Kopf, 2017). Poverty dropped nationwide from 44 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2016, with more significant gains in urban areas (The World Bank, 2019). The country's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), launched in 2005, has helped reduce poverty in rural areas to 26 percent by providing cash-based aid to chronically food-insecure people (The World Bank, 2020; Hobson & Campbell, 2012). While unemployment is relatively low in Ethiopia due to reliance on subsistence agriculture, youth unemployment and informal employment rates exceed the national average. Young women (15-24 years) are particularly economically vulnerable due to higher participation in the informal economy (Stavropoulou, M & Gupta-Archer, N., 2017). Many adolescent girls and young women have migrated to find employment. While exact migration rates are unknown, a 2014 report estimated that up to 1500 girls and women were leaving the country daily to work in domestic labor in the Middle East alone (Jones, N. et al., 2014).

Ethiopia's federal political system includes nine ethno-linguistic regions and two administrative states, and is headed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the first person of Oromo ethnicity to hold the office. Since 1991, Ethiopia has been ruled by the same political party, which is a coalition of four ethnically based parties. Despite this arrangement, ethnic conflict regularly sparks protest and violence (Lashitew, A., 2019). Abiy released political prisoners and oversaw reforms upon coming into office. One reform was repeal of a policy that severely restricted advocacy groups by mandating that 90 percent of their budget had to be raised domestically. Abiy also appointed women to 50 percent of his cabinet positions. Ethiopia has its first female president in Sahle-Work Zewede, and 38 percent of parliamentarians are women (Jeffrey, J., 2020). General elections were to be held in August 2020, but Abiy, who is running for reelection, and ruling party legislators have postponed them due to COVID-19 (Dawit Endeshaw, 2020). The delay may cause a constitutional crisis, as Abiy's term ends in October.

Ethiopia has made significant progress on child marriage trends in recent decades, seeing rates of marriage before age 18 decline among women aged 20-24 from 75 percent in 1980 to 40 percent in 2016 (Central Statistical Agency, 2016). This progress varies greatly across regions. Tigray, Amhara, SNNPR and Addis Ababa made the most headway, Afar and Somali remained the same, and Harari has worsened (UNICEF, 2018). Ethiopia must accelerate progress to fulfill the government's commitment to end the practice by 2025 (UNICEF, 2018). Globally, Ethiopia has the 15th highest prevalence and 5th highest absolute number of girls married before 18.

Figure 1. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 (UNICEF, 2018)



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"> Regional differences shape prevalence and specific drivers for child marriage At the national level, child marriage prevalence declines in upper economic quintiles, but in some regions, richer girls get married younger than poorer girls Orthodox Christian and Muslim religious groups both have perpetuated child marriage, although with different characteristics Systemic gender inequality has excluded women from decision-making power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban areas need less emphasis, as child marriage prevalence has declined significantly in cities Sub-regional hotspots require contextualized responses that address local drivers Interventions addressing poverty may work in some places, but will be less effective in others, as economic class is not a universal driver of child marriage across the country

Where a girl is born in Ethiopia has a significant bearing on her age at first marriage. Ethiopia's ethno-linguistic regions differ in important ways from each other in terms of the conditions that facilitate child marriage. The table below displays some of the documented regional variations:

REGION	MEDIAN AGE AT MARRIAGE ³	CHARACTERISTICS
Amhara	16.2	Great variation among communities; has ceremonial marriage of very young children which does not involve cohabitation (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016); both bride and groom's families contribute land and livestock to couple on marriage (interview, 6/18); child marriage forms bonds with neighbors (interview, 6/30); higher access to education and child marriage programs (interview 6/18)
Oromia	17.4	Mostly rural; poverty means parents share land with sons instead of splitting (interview 6/18); 52% of women have no formal education (McDougal et al., 2018); girls may "choose" early marriage (Interview 6/18); high number of hotspots (Interview, 6/18); some polygyny, mostly among richer men (Pankhurst et al., 2016)
Afar	16.4	Majority Muslim, very low population density; <i>Absuma</i> system of marrying maternal cousin is culturally embedded to cement clan ties; response to girls' resistance can be public rape (Interview, 6/18); some girls are escaping to Middle East or Djibouti (Interview, 6/18)

³ (UNICEF & Ministry of Finance, 2019)

Gambela	17.3	Relatively high median age at marriage masks a rate of 44% marriage among girls 10-14 in Jikawo (Marshall et al., 2016); Girls are used “as currency for better marriages” for brothers (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016)
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There are also hotspots within these regions that have been difficult to track because sub-regional data is not easily discernable from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports. The UNICEF and Overseas Development Institute’s (ODI) 2016 analysis used 2007 census data to identify child marriage “microclimates,” such as the high rate in Jikawo, Gambela (Marshall et al., 2016). One informant attributed these differences to “culture, landholdings, and poverty” (Interview, 6/18). Despite differences, “most ethnic groups share those influencers and norms” that sustain CEFM (Interview 6/26).

Urban/rural differences are also very strong indicators of vulnerability to CEFM, with urban women marrying 2.6 years later than rural women. Women in Addis Ababa marry the latest, at a median age of 23.9 years (Central Statistical Agency, 2016). One informant said they have tracked adolescent girls in urban areas who got married, and “it’s more stigmatized...it tends to be girls who migrated, weren’t successful with their ambitions, and then fell into marriage” (Interview, 6/18).

Regional variation also affects the extent to which poverty is a factor in driving CEFM. Prevalence by economic quintile trends downward in the bottom four at 59, 56, 47, and 42 percent, then falls drastically in the top quintile to 22 percent (UNICEF & Ministry of Finance, 2019). In areas where there is bride price – the bride’s family is paid by the groom’s – poverty may be an incentive to “exchange their daughters for cash” (Boyden, 2013). Poor grooms’ families may also want to bring a girl into their household as additional labor, and poor brides’ families may not want to risk delaying marriage if the groom is financially stable (Marshall et al., 2016). However, in some areas, richer girls are more at risk because their marriage forms an alliance between two richer families. In hotspots “economic poverty does not emerge as a strong driver” as families may be looking for financial stability, but their motivations are “not desperation but aspiration” (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016).

Christian Orthodox and Islam are the main religions in Ethiopia, and while both have high rates of child marriage, there are some variations (Interview, 6/26). As one informant said, “Religious influence is strong” (Interview 6/26). In Muslim areas, there is more pressure to have a child quickly after marriage, while in Christian areas, delaying the first child through contraceptive use is accepted (Interview, 6/18). In Amhara, Orthodox priests or deacons marry girls before they reach puberty because of the emphasis on these men marrying virgins (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016).

Systemic gender inequality cuts across religions, ethnic groups, and income levels in Ethiopia. Women are more likely to have lower literacy rates, less likely to participate in the workforce, and less likely to have access to land (World Bank Group, 2019). Women make up just one third of undergraduate university enrollment (UN Women, 2018b). Women have fought for

access to education, training, and political power, but their access is mediated by men as the main holders of power in Ethiopian institutions (Bekana, 2020).

B. Rules of the Game

This section explores Ethiopia’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"> • Ethiopian law criminalizes child marriage under 18 for boys and girls; includes sanctions on those involved in brokering the marriage • Laws are unevenly enforced and obeyed • Ethiopia’s federal government has committed to end child marriage through international agreements • Social norms are strong drivers of CEFM in Ethiopia and are regionally and sub-regionally varied • Girls may be “choosing” marriage more now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopian laws and policies on child marriage have increased chances to end/delay marriage • Norms and fear of adolescent sexuality provide parents with incentives to evade the law • Improved enforcement of child marriage laws requires norms changes among community leaders, officials, judges • Reports of rise in “voluntary” child marriage reflect girls’ increasing autonomy, lack of alternatives

In 2000, the Ethiopian Family Code established 18 as the legal age for marriage “regardless of traditional or religious ceremonies,” and the Civil Code in 2005 established penalties, including imprisonment, for adults involved in child marriage (Hodgkinson, 2016). The law sets penalties according to the minor’s age, with a maximum of seven years possible for marriage to a minor under 13 (UN Women, 2018a). Ethiopia’s regions have the right to ratify – or refuse to ratify -- federal laws, thereby determining their enforcement in that region; every region has ratified the child marriage law except for Afar and Somali regions (Jones et al., 2016; Interview, 6/26). There are no federal laws requiring school attendance, accommodation for young mothers to stay in school, or sex education in school (UN Women, 2018b).

Surveys have found that most people know about the law and have heard of prosecuted cases (Kakal et al., 2016). Schools provide an important opportunity to identify cases, and girls feel comfortable reporting to teachers, particularly in Amhara where there are more schools, better attendance, and school-based child marriage programs (Interviews, 6/18, 6/26). Evasion, however, is common (Kakal et al., 2016). Rapists often “marry” their victims, and one informant said, “families know they can get away with it, even with abduction” (UN Women, 2018a; Interview, 6/25). Another highlighted cases where parents were treated leniently, saying, “Everyone in the justice system has the same norms – the judge may be married to someone underage, and child marriage itself is endemic throughout the system” (Interview, 6/26). Parents may not see jail as a

“We need better enforcement, but what influences people’s decisions are religious influencers and sociocultural and gender norms.”
 – Interview, 6/26

deterrent and accept punishment as the price for marrying a girl off (Interview, 6/18).

The Harmful Traditional Practices Strategy, Adolescent Reproductive Health Strategy, and Youth Development and Change Strategy all commit federal and regional governments to act to end child marriage (UNICEF & Young Lives, 2019). The government’s National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C) (2020-2024), a collaborative effort supported by UNICEF, UNFPA and the National Alliance, and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, was approved earlier this year (Interview 6/30).

Ethiopia’s commitment to ending child marriage is codified in several international agreements, including the Maputo Protocol and Plan of Action, and the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child. Ethiopia participated at a high level in the London 2014 Girl Summit, and followed up by organizing a national girls’ summit, which is now an annual event (UN Women, 2018b; UNICEF, 2018).

Social and gender norms are a strong driver of CEFM in Ethiopia, as documented by the literature and described by informants. Some common CEFM practices in Ethiopia include:

TYPE OF CEFM	CHARACTERISTICS
Arranged Marriage	Most common form; a girl may be promised very young and marries when she is seen to be able to run a household; before or at puberty, traditionally; may visit or live with groom’s family until marriage (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009); (Hodgkinson, 2016)
Abduction	Particularly common in rural areas, some with approval of girl’s parents; often downplayed by local officials (Iossifov & Wassie, 2016); Highest in SNNPR at 17.5% (Girls Not Brides, 2015)
“Voluntary Abduction” and Child-Initiated	Girls choosing to marry due to lack of alternatives, social pressure from friends/boyfriend, or wanting to have sex (Iossifov & Wassie, 2016; Interview 6/25)
Absuma	Practice of compulsory marriage to maternal cousin in Afar, a pastoralist, mainly Muslim region; groom may be identified at infancy; exerts “downward pressure” on age at marriage, due to fear that girls will resist if they start school (Interview 6/18)
Religious Leaders	Pre-pubescent marriage to religious leaders to ensure virginity (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016)
Ceremonial	In Amhara, often with very young girls; usually does not involve cohabitation; divorce is common and accepted (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016)

While social and gender norms that contribute to CEFM vary by region, some are shared across cultures. These include:

- Premarital sex is sanctioned for adolescent girls and virginity is valued. Marriage prospects are low for girls if they have had sex or been raped. (Interview 6/26).
- Girls’ freedom is more restricted than boys, they are expected to contribute more to housework, and they can be shunned if they stay out late (Iossifov & Wassie, 2016).
- Adolescents have little voice and agency in their communities, although this is changing. Acceptance of adolescent decision-making can lead to “voluntary” child marriage (UNICEF & Ministry of Finance, 2019; Jones et al., 2016).

- Girls who delay marriage are often stigmatized by peers and community members for being “too old,” unwanted, and left behind (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016).
- Rape is seen as a risk to family honor, but only if girl is not married; marrying the rapist ends the threat to honor (Interview, 6/18; UN Women, 2018a).
- Unmarried girls whose parent or parents have died are seen as a burden, but once married, they are seen as a family asset (McDougal et al., 2018).

C. Here and Now

This section examines the current state of affairs surrounding CEFM in Ethiopia, 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"> • The government is the primary actor on child marriage programs through Ministries, regional bodies, Women’s Development Army, National Alliance • International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have made important headway, but not at scale; civil society less prominent on child marriage • Programs approach child marriage with combination of educational, economic, and norms-based interventions, less on rights-based • Both boys and girls are vulnerable to marriage now, as COVID-19 gives parents the opportunity to arrange marriages without teachers reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders can take complementary roles in accelerating progress on reducing CEFM, but it would take significant investment and capacity building • Local officials, religious leaders, parents, and older sisters are critical influencers • Current programs challenge gender norms but tend not to assert girls’ rights • COVID-19 threatens to reverse progress on child marriage, with children out of school and programs delayed; insecurity also a risk to gains

CEFM Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
Federal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has been active on child marriage for decades; sees ending child marriage as part of eliminating harmful traditional practices and promoting Ethiopia as a gender equitable country • Sees connection to goal to become a lower middle-income country by 2025 • Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MOWCY) is responsible for child marriage policy and law enforcement; developed costed roadmap with UNICEF • President Sahle-Work Zewede presented the costed roadmap as a symbol of her commitment on child marriage; has adopted gender equality as her mission (Interview, 6/25) • MOWCY hosts National Alliance to End FGM/C and Child Marriage, which includes other ministries, UN agencies, donors, INGOs, civil society; meets monthly; needs to be more relevant at a regional level and “more dynamic – not just a monthly meeting” (Interview, 6/26) • “Government is very strong, and they have wide networks that go right down to grassroots” (Interview 6/30)

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
Regional, district, local governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zonal, woreda and kebele (district, subdistrict, and community) offices are instrumental in supporting federal government’s policies and providing programs access to communities (Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall, et al., 2016) • State ministers, district administrators and heads of regional bureaus participated in Girls’ Summit and committed to stronger accountability (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018) • Projects work to win over local officials who may support CEFM (Interview 6/26) • Local authorities interviewed in 2013 expressed opposition to child marriage due to advocacy by child marriage programs (Boyden, 2013)
Quasi-Governmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women Development Armies are unpaid workers recruited by the government, often used in anti- child marriage programs; “most effective mechanism for disseminating messages at scale (Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall, et al., 2016; Interview, 6/18); training is limited (Interview, 7/1) • Child marriage programs engage teachers to encourage girls to stay in school and as enforcement mechanism (Interview, 6/26)
Bilateral and Multilateral Donors (Partial list)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF and UNFPA’s Global Programme to End Child Marriage target country • DFID funds UNICEF through London office; contributed to End Child Marriage Programme Phase I, a 5-year project (2012-17) to develop a model for scale up (Interview 6/18); evaluation concluded that it prevented 34,000 marriages, but was not scalable in Ethiopia because it was not “rooted in government structures” (DFID, 2017) • Canada’s government promotes gender transformative and feminist approaches to CEFM in Ethiopia (Interview, 6/26) • Packard Foundation supports child marriage programming (Population Council, Hiwot Ethiopia, Relief Society of Tigray, and others); works with government to bolster support (Interview, 7/1) • Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has an office, strong engagement in country, supports some of CARE’s work on issue (Interview, 6/25; Interview 6/26)
International Non-Governmental Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large INGOs have been very active on CEFM, including Population Council, CARE, Pathfinder, ODI, and PATH • Population Council has been working on the issue in Ethiopia for 20 years (Interview, 6/30) • ODI’s GAGE project identified hotspots based on 2007 census data, and is now tracking 8,000 adolescents in Oromia, Amhara and Afar in hotspots (Interview, 6/18)
Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional associations fund health and education projects in each region, some stronger than others (Interview, 7/1) • Space for civil society organizations (CSOs) recently opened after repeal of “draconian” law restricting funding for advocacy activities (Interview 6/25; Interview, 6/26; Interview, 6/18) • Informants see a role for CSOs in advocacy, at grassroots level and in hard-to-reach areas, but they don’t have capacity, reach for national programs (Interview, 6/25; Interview, 6/18)

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-led and women’s rights organizations are playing a role in COVID-19 and gender-based violence (GBV) issues (Interview, 6/25)
Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious leaders have been successfully engaged through projects at a local level, but many religious leaders still resistant (Jones et al., 2014) • National level, Christian Orthodox and Muslim groups have collaborated, including in National Alliance to End FGM/C and Child Marriage
Individual Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls themselves are a critical target. “Center them and then identify their spheres of influence” (Interview, 6/25). “Girls who succeed in their education provide examples to their peers” (Jones et al., 2014) • Older girls and sisters are “close positive influencers” and have been able to push back on parental pressure (Interview, 6/26) • Fathers “usually the final decision-makers on a marriage” (McDougal et al., 2018)

Strategic Links with Other Issues

International partners and the Ethiopian government have approached child marriage in conjunction with related issues, including FGM/C, health, education, and economic empowerment. The most well-known programs from CARE, Population Council, and DFID combined multiple elements. Integration with these issues offers opportunities for synergies and child marriage reduction, but poses challenges as well:

	Opportunities	Challenges
FGM/C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government links the two issues in policies, with National Alliance • If FGM/C is happening just before marriage, links make sense (Interview, 6/18) • Appropriate in areas like Afar and Somali where the two issues are prevalent (Interview, 6/26) • Facilitates a broader examination of gender norms at the foundation of both practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Risks and practice of FGM are different, especially across age and region” (Interview 6/18) • Risk of leaving girls out of FGM interventions, as the age of FGM is dropping (Interview, 6/18) • Drivers are different – education and wealth are more often protective against CEFM than FGM (Interview, (6/26)
Health & Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting family planning has reduced stigma and parental concerns around premarital pregnancy in Amhara and Tigray (Interview, 6/26; Jones et al., 2016) • Girls with sexual and reproductive health (SRH) training improved knowledge and negotiating skills on SRH; community prevented 70 child marriages (Hodgkinson, 2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family planning promotion in Oromia, Afar, and Somali did not reduce stigma for family planning use even for married women (Jones et al., 2016) • SRH messaging may not be effective in contributing to child marriage reduction. For example, family planning promotion may not delay marriage because most girls do not have sex before marriage, and teen pregnancy does not drive CEFM there (Interview, 6/30)

	Opportunities	Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking reduction in child marriage to lower maternal and child deaths is effective messaging (Interview, 6/25) • Gatekeepers more receptive to family planning or nutrition messaging at outset than CEFM (Interview, 6/26) 	
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is highly correlated with delayed marriage (Central Statistical Agency, 2016) • Communities generally support girls' education if accessible (Raj et al., 2019) • School-based CEFM programs have been effective on anti-CEFM messaging, teachers help prevent or identify cases (Hodgkinson, 2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel education makes girls "less valuable as brides" because they may have premarital sex (Raj et al., 2019) • Out-of-school girls are not reached • Support for school is lower where girls are "needed for work and destined for marriage" (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016) • Economic barriers and risk of assault on way to school (Raj et al., 2019)
Economic Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment options are essential for girls to remain unmarried, validate schooling (Raj et al., 2019) • Land fragmentation is playing positive role, with school as best option for economic success (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016) • Empowerment programs can increase girls' aspirations, including for male-dominated fields (Raj et al., 2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low job opportunities for girls and young women currently exist, especially if they have limited mobility (Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall, et al., 2016) • Risk of excluding boys, who also need employment options and may be marrying early in some areas (Harage and Oromia) because they have no education/employment options (Interview, 6/18)

While girls' empowerment and gender norms change were woven into many programs in a significant way, these programs are not usually branded as rights based. One informant pointed out that Ethiopia's law that restricted rights-based advocacy has hindered a discussion around rights. This informant also said that programs addressing gender norms may face more resistance among development stakeholders in Addis Ababa than at the community level. "Communities are open to trying anything...They are more amenable to change than when we address these issues in the capital city" (Interview, 6/30).

Effects of Violence/Instability and COVID-19 on CEFM

The literature and informants point to convincing evidence that both COVID-19 and ethnic/political instability are having serious impacts on child marriage rates and programming. Several informants noted that political instability and violence risks program results and continuation in many regions (Interview, 6/25; Interview, 6/26). One informant pointed to rising sexual and gender-based violence rates in Amhara, saying "conflict and insecurity are a big driver [of CEFM] in Amhara" (Interview, 6/18) because child marriage is seen as protective to family honor in cases of rape.

CARE’s rapid gender analysis on the effects of COVID-19 on Ethiopia found that the closure of schools has led to an increase in child marriage prevalence, with one region reporting 500 additional child marriages, although it does not appear they have data for comparison purposes (Afeework, M. & Mahuku, E., 2020). With schools closed in rural areas, girls have been working on family farms, and it remains to be seen whether they will return to schools upon reopening (Jones et al., 2020). The pressure to marry may extend to boys as well (Interview, 6/18). One informant said that communities tend to backslide on child marriage in Ethiopia during crises, due to the “strong norms underlying CEFM that stay the same (Interview, 6/26).

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 Ethiopia has evolved, and where the literature and informants identified threats and obstacles to progress.

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases in child marriage prevalence since 1980 may have been driven by economic and schooling gains; they mask stagnation or increases in regional/subregional hotspots • Sub-regional data can be difficult to derive from DHS data, which is reported regionally • Programs have been successful but tend to be small scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopia’s advantages on tackling CEFM include a committed and effective government, strong laws, experienced implementing organizations, and communities receptive to protecting girls • Challenges that remain include focused data collection, finding balance between scalability and local responsiveness, reaching inaccessible communities and out-of-school girls.

Areas of Progress

According to the literature and informants, the notable drop in child marriage prevalence in Ethiopia since 1980 may be primarily due to contextual factors, with CEFM advocacy, programmatic, and research responses playing a critical but secondary role. Those contextual factors, as explained by the UNICEF/UNFPA Global Programme include, “Investments in girls’ education, economic growth and stronger governance” (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). The country’s PSNP reaches 10 million people and has helped alleviate rural poverty, with some indications that recipient families are more likely to send their daughters to school (Interview 6/26)(Gavrilovic et al., 2020). Against this favorable backdrop, responses to CEFM have made important headway, particularly in Amhara.

The federal government’s early and strong engagement on CEFM, as described by the literature and informants, has facilitated community-level action, and propelled the issue onto the agendas of local leaders. The evidence suggests that international **advocacy** has played a sizable role in this engagement, as the Ethiopian government is committed to being seen as a leader on gender equality in the region. The extent to which Ethiopia needs to be pushed for further progress was a matter of some debate among informants, but one said, “I’m really cynical about Ethiopia’s ability to tackle CEFM without international pressure” (Interview, 6/26).

Another, however, extolled the government's commitment, demonstrated through its high-level representation at the London Summit for Girls and their support for programming (Interview, 6/30). The Ethiopian Girls' Summit engaged the women's standing committee of the federal parliament and regional councils to strengthen accountability on anti-child marriage commitments (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). The country agreed to be profiled as part of the World Bank/ICRW study on the economic impacts of child marriage (2017). The President's launch of the costed 5-year national action plan on child marriage provides benchmarks for holding the government accountable (UNICEF & Ministry of Finance, 2019).

Government support has been essential to the success of **programs**, according to informants. Many cited the success in Amhara, particularly among girls under age 15 (Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall, et al., 2016). Community-based programs have helped 77 Amharan kebeles (neighborhoods) declare themselves child-marriage-free (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). Population Council's Berhane Hewan project launched girls' clubs, facilitated asset transfers (such as goats), supported girls' schooling, and engaged community members in Amhara. At endline, girls in both the 12-14 range and 15-17 range were two-thirds less likely to be married (The Population Council, 2019). CARE's Abdiboru project in Oromia has also had important results in changing social norms, despite political instability in the focus area. CARE's multidimensional approach targeted girls, their communities and local government, and featured community score cards, village savings and loans, and social analysis and action groups. They found significant reduction in early marriage, reaching 44% reduction when all interventions were combined (Addis Continental Institute of Public Health, 2020).

The extensive **research** done on CEFM in Ethiopia has advanced targeted and effective programs. Evaluations of child marriage programs have provided important information about what interventions work. Several informants referenced ODI's work to identify sub-regional hotspots and the types of marriage that prevail in each region, starting to move programs away from "one size fits all" (Interview, 6/26; Interview, 6/18). Research such as the World Bank's work on economic impacts of child marriage can help government officials understand the importance of investing in child marriage programs (Wodon et al., 2018). Longitudinal studies, such as ODI's current tracking of 8,000 adolescents in hotspots in Oromia, Amhara, and Afar, can provide additional understanding of critical context (Interview, 6/18).

Obstacles to Progress

To reach Ethiopia's goals by 2025, progress must be 10 times faster (UNICEF, 2018). Afar, Somali, and Harari need the most rapid acceleration (UNICEF, 2018). Instability and the COVID-19 crisis were the most commonly cited contextual threats to CEFM progress. Informants were concerned that these external threats will drive a rise in CEFM because the social and gender norms that underpin the practice remain in place (Interview, 6/26).

In terms of **advocacy**, while the government's top-down approach has been effective at establishing a clear national commitment to ending child marriage, there are inherent risks to the government being the sole country-based owner of the issue. Civil society is not positioned in terms of capacity or political strength to hold the government accountable to its

commitments (Interview, 6/26). Women-led organizations are rare, local officials tend to be men, and “No political party has taken up gender equality as their agenda” (Interview, 6/25).

Informants say the government needs pressure to demonstrate ongoing commitment, including putting its own resources into the costed road map (Interview, 6/26). One informant saw the costing exercise as flawed, with not enough powerful ministries behind the strategy and budget (Interview, 6/18). Advocacy efforts also need to target the PSNP program, which could be a powerful tool for CEFM efforts (Interview, 6/26).

The primary risk to **programs** according to stakeholders is the quiet resistance and skirting of laws happening at the community level. “Places can say they’re free of CEFM and people can be innovative around how they evade the law,” said one informant (6/18). Social norms programs are especially critical to prevent backsliding, but they are costly (Interview, 6/18). Programs don’t seem to have a response to rising rates in some areas due to earlier puberty and girls “choosing” to marry (Jones, Tefera, Emirie, et al., 2016).

“Compared to other places, there is a huge amount of investment that needs to be made into women’s rights organizations and civil society to be more vocal and integrate into the CEFM agenda.”

– Interview, 6/26

While the programs cited above have been successful, they have been small, and scale is a daunting challenge. Projects must be adapted to local context, school-based programs leave out vulnerable girls, and mass media is “too big” (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). One informant said, “implementing partners prefer CEFM campaigns as their comfort zone instead of scalable programming, as the latter requires much more concerted effort over a significant period of time” (Interview, 6/18). Another informant was also skeptical that organizations are leveraging the hotspot data to adapt their programs (Interview, 6/16).

Programs also should not ignore that building girls’ agency in the current context can put girls at risk of rape or kidnapping. One informant said, “It’s a public occurrence in Ethiopia. You need to look at this. One doesn’t want unintended consequences of reducing CEFM being increased violence” (Interview, 7/1). While Women’s Development Armies can be effective tools for reaching the grassroots, they are also unpaid labor and tend to be “more deprived and distressed than their neighbors” (Maes, K. et al., 2018). The gender implications of programs relying on an unpaid all-female workforce are important to weigh against potential advantages.

While the GAGE **research** provided insight at the sub-regional level on child marriage, ongoing data collection needs to happen more frequently and through sentinel sites (Jones, Tefera, Presler-Marshall, et al., 2016). Ethiopia should also support its regional agencies in carrying out the costed plan using the roadmap’s monitoring and evaluation framework (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). Informants identified research gaps on divorce, reasons for slow progress, and measurement of drivers in marriage transactions (Interview, 6/30). Economic drivers need to be separated to distinguish between marriages stemming from poverty and those related to economic opportunity (Interview, 6/18).

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 Ethiopia?

- **Ethiopia is at a potential turning point.** Economic growth and increased investment in schooling may have driven down child marriage prevalence in the past 40 years, but progress has not been universal and may be fragile. COVID-19 and political instability threaten to contribute to backsliding in communities whose social norms around CEFM have not changed. Given that Ethiopia is 5th in global burden of child marriage, stagnation or worsening would affect a large number of girls. Investment at this urgent moment can help stem regression in a country seen by many as a global success story.
- **Ethiopia has important ingredients for success but needs more resources.** Ethiopia is equipped with experienced donors and partners and an evidence-based roadmap for continued progress but does not have the resources for massive CEFM interventions at scale. Multi-sectoral programs for social norms change are costly, and have not been funded at scale, but small-scale programs show the promise of these interventions. Even though Ethiopia receives extensive investment for CEFM programs, informants asserted that there are entire communities untouched by interventions, and that there is need for increased investment.
- **Donors have existing successful investments on child marriage in Ethiopia (such as CARE's Abidorou and Pathfinder's Act with Her) and relationships with stakeholders.** Donor presence in Ethiopia and relationships with the Ethiopian government and implementing organizations enhance their influence on this issue. Existing investments on child marriage through CARE and Pathfinder are well regarded, and donors likely would welcome an expansion of CEFM efforts here.

B. Where are the key points of leverage on CEFM in Ethiopia?

- **The Ethiopian government has extensive reach and commitment.** The government wants to be seen as making progress on this issue, and it has extensive tools at its disposal. Laws against child marriage help girls and their supporters hold local leaders accountable. Child marriage is a recognized issue with engaged officials from the Ministerial level down through regional committees and district leaders. The PSNP has broad reach, and there's a push from stakeholders to move it from "just a nutrition program" to adding a gender-transformative lens (Interview, 6/26). Women's Development Armies are also a potential tool, with broad reach into rural communities. Providing them training, stipends, and a voice in implementation would lessen the problematic aspects of their engagement.
- **Robust research provides insights not only about where, but also about how to address different types of marriage.** In the past, programs in Ethiopia have underestimated the complexity and regionally varied prevalence of child marriage. Building on hotspot analyses can help programs target the areas with the highest prevalence and fine-tune their interventions to address local child marriage practices. Sub-regional data can also

identify broader trends that may require urgency – such as areas where girls risk violence if they resist child marriage – or a shift in focus – such as areas where girls are “choosing” marriage against their parents’ wishes. INGOs in Ethiopia have also rigorously evaluated their approaches, giving insights into CEFM in Ethiopia that many other countries in the region lack.

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

- **More information on economic drivers can help promote responses in areas where CEFM is driven by aspiration instead of desperation.** The PSNP may be effective in reducing child marriage among households that are chronically poor but leave out girls (and boys) whose families aren’t destitute but have dismal chances for economic advancement. Research on these drivers can help identify the specific incentives needed to prevent child marriage in these situations.
- **Gaps in data should be filled with sentinel sites and more frequent monitoring.** Analyzing sub-regional data in Ethiopia was tremendously important for programmatic responses in Ethiopia. Programmatic data collection helps but leaves communities out and is not frequent enough to identify trends. Regional monitoring and evaluation through the government and sentinel sites can provide more frequent data on CEFM trends and characteristics.
- **Programs should become more sophisticated in addressing specific types of child marriage.** The messaging, incentives, and approaches needed to address Absuma will be very different than what’s needed to combat “voluntary abduction.” While certain methodologies can be adapted to any context, project design should identify the type of marriage in the target area and the theory of change should demonstrate how it will address the norms and incentives that drive that type of marriage.
- **Women-led civil society organizations can play an important role in CEFM reduction.** Women-led Ethiopian CSOs have been disempowered by systemic gender inequality and Ethiopia’s punitive laws on advocacy and human rights. The rights of women and girls have not been promoted at the community level, and women’s issues at a national level have been defined almost exclusively by the government in recent years. International donors are the primary source of accountability for the government. With the relaxation of CSO advocacy laws, there is an opportunity to seed girls’ and women’s grassroots organizing to keep momentum at a local level, while building the capacity of national women’s groups to ensure government accountability to its commitments on gender and rights.

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APPENDIX A. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

KII Interview Guide – Ethiopia

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 Ethiopia on this issue, and we greatly appreciate your input in this process. Your responses will help shape a contextual understanding of CEFM in Ethiopia, 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 Ethiopia 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 Ethiopia? (probe for geographical, environmental differences)

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

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

How has historical gender inequality affected CEFM?

Rules of the Game

Ethiopia has had **very strong laws on CEFM** for years. How have these laws affected CEFM and CEFM programs in communities? What happens in regions that haven't ratified the law?

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

Where are social norms on CEFM very different from the rest of the country? What are the most common social norms related to CEFM?

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? Does the National Alliance to End FGM/C and Child Marriage include civil society?

Who is **empowered to act** and what help do they need to be effective?

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

What are the limitations of their influence?

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

What role does **media** in Ethiopia play in CEFM?

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

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

Is **CEFМ 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 programmatic linkages with FGM**?

Is CEFM considered a women's rights issue at the grassroots level? Or is it considered part of an economic development agenda?

How have laws on advocacy limiting foreign donations to domestic advocacy groups affected CEFM or other women's rights efforts?

Are there any actors who have an **economic interest** in change on CEFM? Any who have an economic interest in keeping things the same?

Dynamics

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

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

How is CEFM being monitored and what are the challenges to doing so?

Where are the gaps (in programming, research, advocacy)?

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?