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

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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 Niger 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"> • Geographical characteristics underpin need for social solidarity among families • There are limited economic class differences re: the practice of CEFM • There are small variations on child marriage prevalence by ethnicity, and no notable religious differences • Historical gender inequality is the source of CEFM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child marriage sustains families through economic emergencies • It may be more effective to target regional differences in child marriage, than differences based on class or ethnicity • Most powerful structures in Nigerien society are dominated by men
Rules of the Game <i>(e.g. laws, international commitments, policies, social norms)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Code affirms marriage for girls at age 15 and recognizes customary and religious law in marriage and divorce • International agreements commit Niger to ending marriage before age 18 • Social norms within Niger are founded in patriarchal beliefs and reward families and communities for CEFM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niger’s laws are inconsistent with international commitments • Social norms carry much greater weight than national laws • Marriage in Niger is driven by fear of pre-marital sex and pregnancy • Nigerien children are recognized socially as adults through marriage alone • Women’s principal value is in service to their husbands, in-laws, and children
Here and Now <i>(e.g., current events and circumstances)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders include key champions within presidency and ministries; UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme; and coordinating bodies to harmonize the work of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). • Most visible work on CEFM is by INGOs; perception that CSOs are weak, but they have stronger connections to communities than INGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller CSOs and NGOs compete with larger INGOs for resources and legitimacy, despite their advantage of being closer to local communities • Education efforts are promising, but in the absence of changes re: social norms and economic conditions, they may leave girls worse off • Marriage is seen as protective against armed groups • Due to COVID-19, service delivery resources are being diverted and girls are

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
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child marriage programs are limited by structural deficiencies and gender norms • Threats of armed conflict and COVID-19 may increase CEFM 	feeling more vulnerable while schools are closed
Dynamics <i>(e.g., interplay among the other pillars)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy progress includes a costed National Action Plan, local gains with religious and traditional leaders • Research has illuminated the social norms and structural economic issues re: CEFM • Programmatic gains in community outreach • Political power of religious fundamentalists and weakness of CSOs threatens gains • Large research gaps, particularly on program evaluation, behavior change in men, and influence of polygamy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been public commitments to future action and public affirmation that the topic is of national importance • Thanks in part to research and advocacy, implementing groups have made progress in designing promising CEFM programs • Efforts to raise the age of marriage will be difficult, given Niger’s community resistance to the idea and the fact that constructive alternatives do not exist for girls

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

Case for Investment

- Niger has the highest prevalence rate of child marriage
- Civil society organizations in Niger need increased investment and attention
- Niger’s CEFM solutions require changes across many sectors, but strategic entry points within a single sector can have an impact and play to donors’ strengths

Key Points of Leverage in Niger on CEFM

- The costed National Action Plan offers a roadmap for advocacy
- Community-level approaches that address social norms and economic vulnerability offer best hope for programmatic change
- Successful investments will engage religious and traditional leaders, the youth, fathers, and husbands as essential influencers

Turning Gaps into Opportunities

- Media engagement can begin to shift social norms while countering fundamentalist influence
- CSO leadership with INGO support can underpin the long-term effort CEFM reduction will require
- Policy change should be an advocacy priority over legal reform in Niger’s current political reality.
- Research should identify successful models for local action
- Social norms should be addressed through a “do no harm” perspective

- Networks and connections between villages, especially those targeting youth leadership, can bridge information and role model gaps, and empower youth voices.

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 Niger 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.

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 Nigerien society understands and enforces male and female roles and responsibilities, and how Nigerien political dynamics have shaped movements for 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 Niger, 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 Niger.

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

In 2019, Niger ranked last on the Human Development Index, 187 out of 189 on expected years of schooling (6.5) and had the 4th lowest gross national income (GNI) per capita among all countries, at \$912, while in 2018, the country ranked last on the Gender Inequality Index for poor reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status for women (UNDP, 2019). Niger's fertility rate is also highest in the world, averaging 6.9 in 2018, and contraceptive prevalence is very low at 20.7% for married/in-union women (FP2020, 2019).

Niger's poor rankings are in part a function of natural resource constraints, amplified by the impacts of climate change; drought is the greatest risk facing the country and desertification is worsening the viability of already scarce land resources (Gambo Boukary et al., 2016). During the country's "lean season" from June to October, coinciding with the rainy season, stores from the previous harvest run low, food prices rise, and the incidence of diarrheal disease and malaria is elevated (Langendorf et al., 2014). As much as 1/3 of the country's rural population migrates during this time (Afifi, 2011). Additionally, one in two children in Niger is chronically malnourished (Burki, 2013).

Niger's president Mahamadou Issoufou was first elected in 2011 after a coup and brief military rule and reelected in 2016 for a second five-year term. Niger has a unicameral National Assembly with 171 seats, elected through party-list proportional representation every five years, which means parties submit lists of candidates and win seats according to their percentage of the overall vote. In 2001, women's rights activists won passage of a decree mandating at least 10 percent representation of both women and men on party lists (Kang, 2018). In 2019, the Assembly increased the women's quota of elective positions from 15% to 25% and appointed positions from 25% to 30% (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

Niger's child marriage rate for girls³ is the world's highest. Recent representative data is unavailable, as the 2017 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) was canceled due to data quality issues. According to the 2012 DHS, 76.3% of women aged 20-24 were married before age 18, and 28% were married before age 15 (Institut National de la Statistique - INS/Niger & ICF International, 2013). While there has been some progress in reducing the prevalence of marriage under the age of 15 (from 50.3% in 1992 to 28% in 2012), prevalence of child marriage overall (i.e., girls' marriage under age 18) has declined more slowly, dropping only 7.2% - from 83.5% to 76.3% in the same time period. Median age at first marriage for girls is 15.7, an increase from 14.9 since 1992.

³ While the term "child marriage" includes both boys and girls, this report focuses on girls, as the rate for boys is significantly lower.

IV. FINDINGS

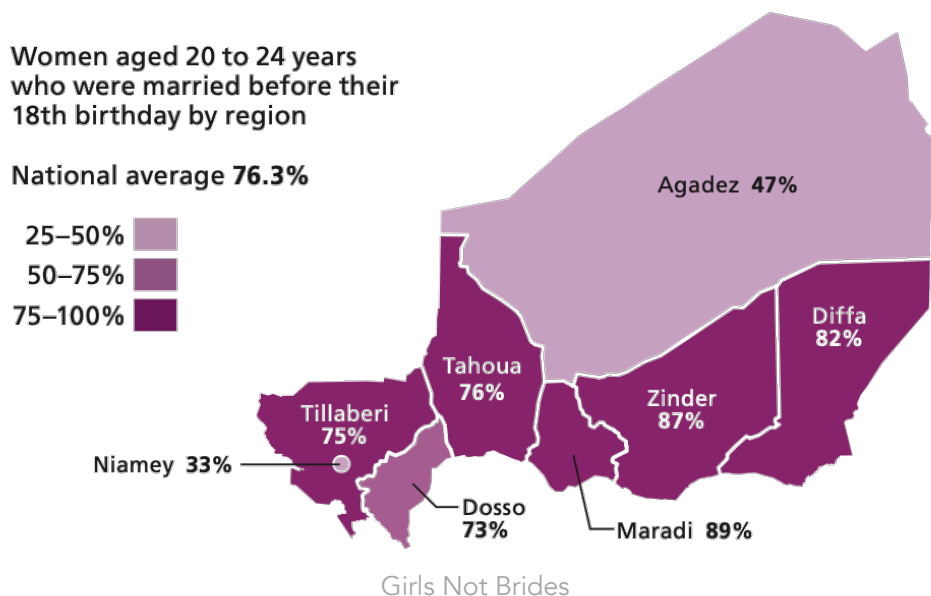
A. Foundational Factors

This section explores embedded or fixed structures that affect CEFM. We explore below Niger's geographical characteristics, economic classes, and ethnicities and how they influence CEFM trends. Embedded structures are those that do not quickly change, and should be considered as constants in any CEFM strategy. The most relevant *foundational factors* to CEFM in Niger are:

- Geographical characteristics that drive economic vulnerability and underpin the need for social solidarity among families
- Limited economic class differences on child marriage prevalence, except for those in the highest wealth quintile
- Small variations on child marriage prevalence by ethnicity

Niger's geography – including its arid environment, dispersed population and history of migration - have contributed to its economic stagnation and difficulty in addressing CEFM. Niger's historical vulnerability to drought and other emergencies has driven migration and security problems (Fenn et al., 2015). The national government, located in the southwest corner of the country, has a very limited ability to provide a safety net and is immaterial to most Nigeriens' lives. Evidence suggests that child marriage helps families sustain themselves through these kinds of emergencies by strengthening community solidarity (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018).

Regional distribution of child marriage in Niger¹



Niger's primarily rural population has higher rates of child marriage than counterparts in urban areas (Chata Malé & Quentin Wodon, 2016). Among women aged 20-49 in Niamey, the median age of marriage is 19.5; in rural areas it is 15.6. It is lowest in the regions of Zinder (15.4), Maradi (15.4), and Tahoua (15.8). However, some regional evidence suggests DHS may underestimate rates of CEFM. A 2019 Promundo study that surveyed adolescent girls (age 13-19) estimated median age first marriage in the Dosso region to be 14.1, substantially lower than the estimates of 16.3 from the 2012 DHS, which surveys women of reproductive age (Spindler et al., 2019). In the Promundo study, over half (56.6%) of girls surveyed were married between the ages of 10 and 14. A 2017 survey by the More Than Brides Alliance found that 28.9% of females aged 15-19 in Tillaberi reported being married by age 15 and in Maradi, the number was 61.5% (Melnikas et al., 2019). Rural areas also suffer from a lack of social services that might ameliorate CEFM, such as schools and health centers (UNICEF, 2016).

Rates of child marriage are above 80 percent in all but the top quintile of wealth, where it drops to just below half (49.2). In most other countries with high rates of child marriage, girls from the lowest wealth quintile are most likely to be married. Niger's high rates across economic classes suggests that while poverty has some influence, it is not the primary driver of child marriage (Malé & Wodon, 2016). Niger has the custom of bride price – the groom's family paying a sum to the bride's family – but the financial incentive to marry is small because the bride's family is responsible for purchasing her food and other basic necessities as she prepares to move to her new home (UNICEF, 2016). As one informant said, "[CEFM] is linked to beliefs and sexism more than poverty. Even intellectuals marry their daughters early because they are desperate for girls to remain virgins until marriage" (Interview, 5/20). There are, however, many economic ramifications of CEFM, discussed in the Here and Now section below.

Ethnicity in Niger has some influence on the age at which a girl gets married, but the practice is accepted among all ethnic groups. Just over half of Niger's people are Hausa, with Zarma the second largest group at 21 percent, and Tuareg at 11 percent. Rural Hausa communities tend to have higher rates of child marriage (Fenn et al., 2015; Spindler et al., 2019) and one researcher noted finding that Hausa girls tend to be married younger than those in the Zarma ethnic group (Interview, 5/13). The Tuareg in the Tahoua region have a practice of *wahaya* – or sexual slavery – in which rich men purchase a girl of slave descent as an illegitimate wife (Abdelkader & Zangaou, 2012; Girls Not Brides, 2020). There is evidence that some Hausa men have purchased *wahaya* as well (Abdelkader & Zangaou, 2012). This practice is illegal, which may explain the lack of evidence on its prevalence. One interviewee said that there are regional differences in norms relating to consent required for marriage, which may reflect cultural differences among ethnicities or influence of traditional or religious leaders. In the Dosso region, for example, girls' consent is required before marriage, unlike other regions (Interview, 5/15). Above all, child marriage tends to be geographically clustered, with girls more likely to marry young in villages where their aunts, mothers, and sisters have also married young (Interview, 5/13).

Gender inequality underpins child marriage in Niger, as elsewhere (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Historical male dominance of all of Niger's power structures, including political, economic, religious and familial, has perpetuated unequal social systems and patriarchal norms (Kang, 2015). There is strong evidence that the expansion of Islam into Niger and French colonialism pushed women from leadership positions and shaped the particular forms of gender inequality seen today. For example, the French created a system in Niger that gave local power to those educated in Western schools, yet Nigerien women had no access to these schools until independence in 1960 (Bergstrom, 2002). The gender norms described below have emerged from a historical context that positions women primarily as wives and mothers, whose duty is to obey husbands, fathers, and in-laws and whose fertility is valued and guarded (UNICEF, 2016; Girls Not Brides, 2020).

B. Rules of the Game

This section explores Niger'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. According to informants and the literature, social norms are by far the most influential on individual behaviors in Niger and the most resistant to change. The *rules of the game* that shape CEFM include:

- A civil code that affirms marriage for girls at age 15 and recognizes customary and religious law in marriage and divorce
- International agreements that commit Niger to ending marriage before age 18
- Social norms founded in patriarchal beliefs that reward families and communities for CEFM

Niger has committed to the Sustainable Development Goal to eliminate child marriage by 2030, and while the President of Niger has pronounced that child marriage will no longer be tolerated, no laws have been adopted and sanctions on early marriage remain minimal (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Niger's legal minimum age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, according to the 1993 Civil Code, which is still in force (Girls Not Brides, 2020). However, judicial law gives customary law deciding authority in marriage, divorce, and inheritance in Niger (UNICEF, 2016). For example, polygamy is not recognized by civil law, but is legal under customary and religious law (Portail de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, n.d.). While Niger is a secular state, the Islamic Association (AIN) formally registers marriages and the courts can apply Islamic law to marriage (Kang, 2015). Any legal reform effort to raise the age of marriage would have to also negate the power of customary and religious law in these cases.

Past attempts to change Niger's laws on marriage, divorce, and inheritance to improve women's rights have generated fierce opposition from conservative Islamic groups. In 1994 and 2011, efforts to change laws on marriage and divorce came up against Islamic groups, who denounced the proposed changes as "anti-Muslim and anti-democratic," and issued threats against women's rights activists who had been promoting them (Kang, 2015). In 2012, the government attempted to gain approval of a law focused on keeping girls in school that would

have required school heads to report child marriages (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018). As one informant said, Islamic leaders “quickly protested the process and challenged any legislation which would assign an age limit to marriages” (Interview, 5/20). Prior to passage, the law was changed to remove the reporting requirement, retaining vague language that requires informing authorities if anyone interferes with a girl’s education (Kang, 2015).

Despite stagnation in terms of domestic legal reform, Niger has improved its international commitments on child marriage. In 1999, Niger ratified CEDAW (with reservations) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Girls Not Brides, 2020). In 2014, Niger joined with the African Union’s campaign to end child marriage as a means to reduce obstetric fistula and the First Lady of Niger hosted a First Ladies Forum on child marriage in 2017 (Girls Not Brides, 2020). In 2018, as part of UNFPA and UNICEF Global Programme campaign, Niger co-sponsored a UN resolution on child marriage that “urges Member States to enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies aimed at preventing and ending child, early and forced marriage and to work towards the coherence of laws and policies at a local level” (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018).

Niger’s laws allowing marriage for girls at age 15 are inconsistent with these international commitments. However, international pressure has improved political will to change national policies and guidelines to curb child marriage. Niger’s national policies on nutritional security, gender, and gender-based violence all address some aspects of child marriage, some through the lens of early pregnancy (Save the Children UK, 2017). In 2018, UNFPA-UNICEF’s Global Programme helped Niger’s government develop a costed National Action Plan to End Child Marriage, requiring every ministry to include a focus on child marriage in its policies and programs.

The literature and informants agreed that even if it were possible, legal reform would be unlikely to change the practice because the national government “has little influence on people’s daily lives” and would confront “deeply rooted social norms” (Interviews 5/13; 5/15). These social norms create an interlocking system in which the benefits of child marriage are broadly shared (by parents, husbands, in-laws, traditional leaders, and the bride herself) and the costs of child marriage (aside from macro-level costs) accrue almost exclusively to the girl. This gives girls and their communities strong incentives to maintain the status quo.

The desk review and informant interviews identified the following relevant social norms discussed in detail below, all sustaining and sustained by gender inequality:

- Fear and stigma around girls’ premarital sex
- Social cohesion
- Value of younger brides
- Marriage as sole transition to adulthood

As pointed out by many researchers, parents in Niger believe child marriage is protective. Particularly in rural areas, there is high stigma around girls' premarital sex, and child marriage is seen as a way to protect the girl from the shame and family dishonor her loss of virginity would bring (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018; Morgan, 2016; UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). Parents generally define a girl's readiness for marriage not at a certain age, but when she develops breasts or other secondary sex characteristics. In some areas, there is a commonly held fear that menstrual blood will be mistaken for bleeding from loss of virginity, resulting in pressure to marry before a girl begins her period (Girls Not Brides, 2020). "Marriage is considered a strategy to protect girls' physical integrity and virginity and, by extension, their own and their families' honour" (Morgan, 2016). One informant noted how prevalent this perspective is even among educated parents, saying "I have multiple friends who would rather marry off their daughters at 17 or 18 than let them date boys or bear a child out-of-wedlock" (Interview, 5/20).

These norms appear to have great influence over adolescent female behavior. Surveys show girls' median age at first sex is just higher than median age at first marriage, at 16.0 and 15.9, respectively (Fenn et al., 2015). While in some countries, child marriage is a response to adolescent pregnancy, marriage in Niger is driven by fear of pre-marital sex and pregnancy, rather than a reaction to it.

Girls and their families benefit from and highly value social cohesion, and child marriage is a tool for maintaining that cohesion. Individual desires, particularly those of girls, are shaped by and subordinate to the needs and wishes of the family and community (Fenn et al., 2015). For girls, maintaining the family honor is engrained in them as a fundamental duty to their elders. They also face strong peer pressure to marry young, as that is what they see their friends and older role models do (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018). In turn, the family benefits from the relationships forged with the bride's new family, including labor performed for the girl's father by the groom and his friends (Morgan 2016). Such community solidarity is essential for daily life, but more so in times of economic crisis brought on by crop failure or illness. The father in particular risks his own social status if his daughter marries later, because in so doing, he is seen as putting her schooling over the needs of the community (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018).

Younger brides are valued by men in Niger for their fertility and perceived subservience. This is reflected quite literally in bride price, which is often higher for younger girls (Walker, 2013). Because ideal number of children remains high in Niger, girls are expected to prove their fertility and produce a child within two years of marriage (CARE, 2017). Younger girls are believed to be more fertile, and this is linked to perceptions of male virility and social status (Spindler et al., 2019). Men see girls married as children as more pliable to mold to their whims (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018). One informant said, "Men like and want their wives to be obedient, controlled, and to never contradict them. So, the question of early marriage is very deep and involves a close examination of the

relationship between men and women in Niger” (Interview, 5/20). Qualitative data from Maradi collected in the IMAGES study found that men’s financial independence is increasing their ability to choose when and whom to marry, but has not changed norms about fertility and age at first marriage (Spindler et al., 2019). Polygamy also plays a role in sustaining child marriage, as Nigerien men prefer very young brides for their second, third, or fourth wives (UNICEF, 2016). According to Save UK, “In Niger, 18.6% of girls between 15 and 19 years are engaged in a polygamous marriage.” (Save the Children UK, 2017).

The literature also points to a social system that does not recognize a period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Nigerien children – both boys and girls – become adults through marriage alone, and the onset of puberty for girls signals readiness for marriage/adulthood (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l’Enfant, 2018). A person is not allowed to take on adult responsibilities until he or she is married. As a result, “adolescence does not exist” and young people seeking acceptance into adulthood must be married (UNICEF, 2016).

One informant said that “to study early marriages, we need to examine the perception and status of women in Niger” (Interview 5/20). Husbands are the main decision-makers once a girl marries, and her parents make the decisions before that. Until she is an elder herself when she has some ability to make household decisions, she lacks agency (CARE, 2017). As a wife living with her husband’s family, she is also expected to be obedient to and serve her in-laws. A village chief interviewed in a Plan International study said a young bride must “master her new tasks and responsibilities while keeping silent, even when discussions concern her directly, and respect her mother-in-law, taking on her tasks” (Morgan 2016).

C. Here and Now

This section examines the current state of affairs surrounding CEFM. First, we present findings around stakeholders on CEFM, discussing their influence on the issue and strength of their support, if known. We then discuss the linkages CEFM has with key issues in Niger. The literature includes a particular focus on education and economics as critical to CEFM, but implementers also have approached CEFM through a health and women’s rights lens. Finally, we examine the effects of current events on CEFM rates and programs. The most relevant factors in the *here and now* for CEFM in Niger are:

- Stakeholders that include key champions within the presidency and ministries; UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme; and coordinating bodies that harmonize the work of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and civil society organizations (CSO)s.
- Most visible work on child marriage by INGOs, creating potential inefficiencies as CSOs compete for resources and legitimacy
- Strategic links for child marriage programming, most notably with education and economic empowerment programs, but limited by structural deficiencies and gender norms

- Impact of violence increasing CEFM, particularly in Diffa, and potential impact of COVID-19

CEFM Stakeholders

Women’s groups and religious fundamentalist groups have been vocal on CEFM since the proposed family code in 1993-1994, and the number of stakeholders has grown significantly since the African Union’s Campaign to End Child Marriage was launched in 2014 (UNICEF, 2016). The table below summarizes the key stakeholders and their role and position on CEFM.

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
President and First Lady	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Mahamadou Issoufou & First Lady Lalla Malika made regional, global commitments; support UN resolutions; host Summits • First Lady joined ECOWAS First Ladies to keep child marriage a regional priority (Interview, 5/15) • The President’s second and final term expires in 2021 • National elections to be held in December 2020 with current Interior Minister as top candidate
Ministry of Women and Child Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “key lever” in pushing progress on child marriage • Representatives from this Ministry meet with civil society to address challenges (Interviews, 5/15, 5/20)
Ministry of Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has advanced legislation on child marriage (<i>Statut Personnel</i>, 2011) • Currently coordinates child marriage interventions with the Ministry of Women and Child Protection (Interview, 5/27)
Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An important player in recent years • A “high caliber” person heads reproductive health, “very progressive and quite committed to... access to contraception” (Interview 5/19)
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacts with civil society on girls’ education and the 2012 law that protects equal education
National Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has engaged sporadically on this issue. • Advocates: “hoping to engage young parliamentarians to oppose CEFM” (Interview 5/15)
National Coordinating Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized by the government, includes UN and NGOs • Facilitates coordinated action across sectors and accountable for an annual report on its progress (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l’Enfant, 2018)
National Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 40 INGOs, NGOs and CSOs that coordinate work & contribute to the national strategic plan (Interview 5/20)
Bilateral and Multilateral Donors (partial list)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF- UNFPA Global Programme has supported government commitments, National Action Plan, interventions (Interview, 5/20) • Dutch government approach via sexual and reproductive health and rights, with new SRHR expert in the Niger office (Interview, 5/15) • The Canadian government “has a grant to focus on promotion of girls’ education” (Interview 5/15)

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The World Bank's Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) includes adolescent girls' empowerment and reproductive health in Niger
International Non-Governmental Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INGOs are the most visible on CEFM (Interview, 5/15) Primary groups include Plan International, Pathfinder, CARE, Oxfam, Girls Not Brides, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, Simavi, WorldVision (Interviews 5/15, 5/20, 5/27) INGOs' high visibility: potential allies and influencers may see the push for ending child marriage as less legitimate because it stems from external voices (Interview, 5/19, Morgan, 2016)
Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's groups, youth groups, and religious organizations Significant work in both advocacy and community-level implementation on CEFM (Interview, 5/27) Connections to communities are critical Over 80 NGOs in this space (Interview, 5/27) Lack visibility of INGOs, perception of weakness (Interview 5/14) Do not have the same resources or capacity to document their results as the INGOs, which continues a cycle in which they are undervalued (Interview, 5/15).
Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundamentalists opposed policy on CEFM since 1994, more vocal with democratization & increasing religious-based political organizing Resistance by some to attempts to state control on marriage issues, casting these positions as "anti-Muslim" Fear of conservative opposition has slowed legal reform (Kang, 2015) Moderate religious groups engaged by anti-CEFM groups to win allies & neutralize opposition (Interviews, 5/14, 5/19)
Traditional Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical influencers engaged through an association of village leaders Messaging on family planning, fistula, and health (Interview 5/27)
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-run and independent press, international radio networks (VOA, BBC, Radio France) that broadcast in local languages (Interview 5/27) Some programs (serial dramas) on child marriage News media rarely engaged on CEFM, no pressure for change or accountability on CEFM in the national press (Interviews 5/19, 5/27) Radio and television used by fundamentalists to promote their interpretation of Islamic endorsement of CEFM (Interview, 5/20)

CEFM and Education

The literature on CEFM in Niger includes a heavy emphasis on the links to education, and several implementing organizations have focused on schooling as a critical aspect of reducing CEFM. There are currently two types of education programs in Niger, which are not mutually exclusive:

- Advocacy – Work with school officials and local leaders to promote the right of girls’ education
- Expanding educational opportunities – Efforts to improve formal education and expand access to informal education and extra-curricular programming

One informant said that an important aspect of educational programming is the opportunity to wrap other messaging within these programs to change beliefs and attitudes on girls’ rights, such as girls’ and boys’ clubs to engage them on gender equality (Interview, 5/14).

Findings from the literature and interviews show both the promise of education-based interventions to decrease child marriage and the daunting obstacles along this path. We summarize the advantages and disadvantages of approaching CEFM in Niger through an educational lens in the table below:

Advantages of an Education Lens	Disadvantages of an Education Lens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schooling is seen as the only acceptable alternative to marriage for girls in Niger (Interview, 5/27; Morgan, 2016; Perlman et al., 2017) • Many girls want to remain in school (CARE, 2017; Perlman et al., 2017) • Exposes girls to alternative visions of future and role models external to family, village (Interview, 5/14) • Wrap-around programs can address gender norms among girls and boys (Interview, 5/14) • Politically palatable approach to CEFM, including among religious fundamentalists (Interview, 5/14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from parents is conditioned on girls’ success; lack of interest in/from boys (Morgan, 2016; CARE, 2017; Perlman et al., 2017) • Gendered domestic responsibilities in the household keep girls from being able to study outside of school (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l’Enfant, 2018) • Schools often have poorly trained teachers and inadequate infrastructure, including lack of fencing, water or hygiene facilities (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l’Enfant, 2018; UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018). • School costs – including opportunity costs of girls’ labor – can be prohibitive (Perlman et al., 2017) • Distance to secondary schools increases costs, and travel exposes girls to potential sexual violence (Perlman, et al, 2017; UNFPA & UNICEF, 2018; UNICEF, 2016) • Value on younger girls means an educated 18-year-old may have worse economic and marriage prospects than a girl without schooling (Interview, 5/13)

CEFM and Economics

The literature and informants conclude that CEFM in Niger is a resilience mechanism for families with high vulnerability to economic crisis and no social safety net. While social norms are the primary driver for CEFM in Niger, economic conditions shape the context in critical ways.

Economic empowerment projects are widely accepted and can play an important role in CEFM efforts, according to the literature and informants, even if primarily in mitigating rather than preventing CEFM. The table below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of an economic approach to CEFM in Niger.

Advantages of an Economic Lens	Disadvantages of an Economic Lens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can improve girls' leadership and empowerment and support school costs (Ministere de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018) • Can change community's perceptions of girls' value (Ministere de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018; Interview, 5/13) • Politically palatable approach to CEFM (Interview, 5/19) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of internal markets and entrepreneurial opportunities related to poor economic conditions (Interview, 5/19) • Adds additional work on top of girls' schoolwork and/or household responsibilities • Stakeholders may not view economic activity as incompatible with early marriage and childbearing (Interview, 5/19) • May cause girls to abandon school (Interview, 5/27)

One critical question that must be addressed by implementers of economic empowerment projects is around the girls' existing household responsibilities.

- Can unmarried girls sustain economic activities alongside household responsibilities and schooling? If not, what is deprioritized?
- Can married girls produce enough income to release them from their household responsibilities to care for their in-laws?

CEFM and Health

Several stakeholders approach CEFM through the lens of health. Because CEFM in Niger is so strongly linked to early childbearing and fertility, organizations focused on sexual and reproductive health see child marriage as a critical barrier to achieving their health-related objectives (CARE, 2017). This approach can also be politically easier; in 2014, the government branded its national child marriage campaign with a fistula focus to avoid angering religious conservatives (UNICEF, 2016). The table below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of a health lens.

Advantages of a Health Lens	Disadvantages of a Health Lens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messaging around the risks to young mothers of early childbearing has been successful because morbidities such as fistula are so common (Morgan, 2016) • There may be more openness on family planning in difficult economic conditions because of the expense of raising children and decreased agrarian focus (Interview, 5/13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of family planning for young people can be just as difficult to raise as child marriage in communities, due to the high stigma related to pre-marital sex and high value on fertility, although birth spacing is acceptable (CARE, 2017) • Men continue to want young brides to prove their virility by fathering many children (Spindler et al., 2019)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverages families’ desire to protect girls from harm • Health sensitization is culturally more acceptable than a children’s rights lens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to family planning for adolescents is controversial • Access to health services is limited
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CEFM and Gender/Women’s Rights

Women’s rights have been deeply contested in Niger, but an active women’s movement, including several women’s rights CSOs, has existed for decades (Kang, 2015). Most progress for women as visible leaders in business and politics has been centered in Niamey (Interview, 5/27). Attempts to change gender norms have taken an incremental approach, focusing on girls and boys’ clubs, with some attempts to change gender norms among adult influencers (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2018). The following table summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of a gender norms/women’s rights approach:

Advantages of a Gender/Rights Lens	Disadvantages of a Gender/Rights Lens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the gender norms at the core of CEFM • Aligns with international standards • Provides a clear metric for CSOs’ advocacy • Can build on an active Nigerien women’s movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rights-based approaches to child marriage are seen as unproductive, and girls’ rights, especially related to child marriage, are controversial (Morgan, 2016) • Many people associate women’s rights with reproductive rights, which is considered taboo (Interview, 5/27). • Any perception that a rights agenda is externally imposed (from Niamey or internationally) may provoke backlash in other issues • Requires long-term engagement for results

Effects of Insecurity and COVID-19 on CEFM

Security issues have a profound effect on CEFM in Niger. In 2018, Plan International reported on its study of the impact of conflict in the Lake Chad basin on adolescent girls. Diffa is Niger’s most affected region, and the conflict has generated internally displaced people, refugees, violence and severe food shortages across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Although no reliable data exists on the impact on child marriage, focus groups in the region said that child marriage is increasing as a result of the crisis, in part because marriage is seen as protective against armed groups (Plan, 2018; Interview, 5/15). Instability in Niger has affected anti-child marriage initiatives, reducing access in particular for the most vulnerable girls (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic is also likely to affect CEFM, although it is unclear at the moment how significant and in what direction that effect will be. Experiences during Ebola and similar crises suggest that child marriage will increase due to widespread disruptions in service delivery (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Informants caution that they do not yet know enough to make

conclusions. One respondent said, “Using Ebola experience in Guinea and Sierra Leone, we can assume that child marriage rates will go up, but we don’t have substantive evidence to back that up” (Interview, 5/14). Another cited increased calls to helplines as evidence that girls are feeling more vulnerable while schools are closed (Interview, 5/14). The impact on programming has been significant, as many CEFM initiatives are on hold (Interview, 5/15; Interview, 5/27).

UNICEF Niger will track the proportion of girls to boys who return to school once it resumes. They will use these statistics to assess the impact on school participation, then conduct additional research to assess any changes (Interview, 5/20).

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 Niger has evolved, and where threats and obstacles to progress lie.

Dynamics contributing to progress on CEFM include:

- Increased political will
- A costed National Action Plan
- Successful local advocacy efforts, especially with local religious and traditional leaders
- Research illuminating the social norms and structural issues sustaining CEFM
- Programmatic gains in community education

Dynamics contributing to threats on CEFM include:

- Political power of religious fundamentalists
- Relative weakness of CSOs on national-level advocacy
- Community resistance to advocacy on CEFM
- Large research gaps, particularly on program evaluation, behavior change in men, and the influence of polygamy

Areas of Progress

Internationally-based **advocacy** – within regional meetings, from the UN, and from INGOs – has recently increased political will on CEFM in Niger, leading to significant meaningful gains. As one informant said, “At the African Union Summit for the Young Girl, child and early marriage was described as one of Niger’s main challenges, and motivated us to pursue our goal (Interview, 5/20).

In particular, the costed National Action Plan demands cross-sector attention from each of Niger’s Ministries. As one informant noted, “Getting to a national plan alone, in a country where social and gender norms are so deeply ingrained, is a big deal” (Interview, 5/14). While domestic advocacy to support implementation of the plan is still nascent, the Plan offers civil

society a roadmap for holding Ministries accountable to their commitments. The president's involvement in the Plan's launch was both a commitment to future action and public affirmation that the topic was of national importance.

Local advocacy with traditional and religious leaders has also increased, with a "vast number of organizations that work with communities trying to change mindsets," in the words of one informant (Interview, 5/15). Even though it was watered down, the 2012 law on girls' education has given advocates a tool for local advocacy with decision-makers. Local groups can use the law to advocate for girls who want to stay in school when their parents are against it (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018). An interviewee confirmed, saying, "There are local authorities and local women acting against child marriage. Now families can be fined for early marriage" (Interview, 5/27). Work on child protection at the national level has also led to strengthened collaboration at the local level (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2018).

Research in Niger has illuminated the issue of CEFM from different angles, capturing vital information about social norms and other factors that drive CEFM. Recent studies in Maradi, Dosso, Zinder, and Diffa have filled gaps in understanding about child marriage's relationships with fertility, family planning, education, conflict, and economic empowerment. Further research (i.e., the World Bank's and ICRW's Economic Impacts of Child Marriage project (Wodon et al., 2017)) has provided a greater understanding of the many social and economic consequences of child marriage in the country

Thanks in part to research and advocacy, implementing groups have made progress in designing promising anti-child marriage **programs**, particularly around promoting empowerment and supporting education at the community level. One informant remarked, "When you support reflection and dialogue in the community, you do see sparks for change" (Interview, 5/19). Another said, "Community interventions, if taken up and changed into coordinated and multisectoral programs, would yield big change" (Interview, 5/15). These programs have challenged CEFM indirectly by leveraging themes such as education, economic empowerment, and health. Most of these programs have not yet been evaluated, so it remains to be seen how well they reduce or mitigate CEFM.

For continued progress, advocacy, research, and programming must continue to advance together. For example, advocacy to improve girls' access to schools will mean little and may even provoke backlash if there are no programs to improve the schools or shift community norms on CEFM.

Obstacles to Progress

There are significant obstacles to further **advocacy** gains in the current environment. Several informants described religious fundamentalism as the primary threat to further political progress. As one said, "Fundamentalists may speak out against laws around restricting CEFM.

A lot of child marriage work isn't called that explicitly to avoid blowback. Politicians may be hesitant [on the issue]" (Interview, 5/14). Another said, "While child marriage is not taboo, it's definitely a political topic with radical traditional leaders who legitimize CEFM. People seeking reelection can amplify this voice for votes" (Interview, 5/15).

Fundamentalist groups have used public protest and media outlets to press their agenda effectively. One informant described their methods during the campaign for girl's schooling: "When the government tried to pass laws protecting girls a while ago, the fundamentalists went out on the streets with girls in long, black veils to prove that even the girls did not want this law to pass. The girls...were at the front of the protest, exclaiming that the law went against their freedom to marry" (Interview, 5/20). Fundamentalists promote similar messages through television and radio.

Civil society organizations, particularly Nigerien-based groups, do not appear strong enough to confront the fundamentalist threat. In particular, they have not been able to engage journalists or the media to counter conservative messaging. One informant also noted that in contrast to other countries, where civil society has "wrapped around" the National Action Plan, Niger's CSOs have only done so "in patches" (Interview, 5/14).

Local advocacy is complicated by community members' resistance to change, and the tendency to maintain social norms. Local leaders may respond to pressure or influence initially and commit to ending child marriage, but if community members continue to strongly believe in the practice as a protective mechanism for their daughters, leaders are unlikely to follow through (Morgan, 2016). There have also been reports of community members using the vigilance mechanisms around schooling and child marriage to monitor and condemn behavior of young people, particularly girls (Morgan, 2016).

Community resistance is one of the key reasons advocacy around raising the age of marriage is unlikely to succeed at this time. Implementation and enforcement would be difficult in a context where most people do not support the policy, and the lack of constructive alternatives would leave girls worse off – particularly if their parents were fined or jailed for their resistance (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018).

Research has helped advocates and implementers better understand the systems that maintain CEFM, but large gaps remain. Most importantly, the lack of DHS data from 2017 due to quality issues is a significant barrier to understanding what the state of CEFM is currently. Additionally, there is not enough research evaluating efforts to address CEFM in Niger. It also will be important to assess how the policies now being implemented in Niamey are affecting the practices of each Ministry and in turn, how that is affecting practices in communities. Not enough is known about men's decision-making process in terms of marriage, and what interventions might help them shift their behaviors around CEFM. While some of the research discusses polygamy in Niger, there is not a complete picture of how polygamy and CEFM interact. There is little information on some regions of Niger, such as Agadez, where child

marriage has reportedly declined significantly between 1992 and 2012. One informant also noted in particular a lack of understanding of effective programs that address marriages of the very young, i.e., those under 15 years of age (Interview, 5/13).

The most significant challenge for CEFM **programs** is creating a system that provides social protections for girls and is acceptable to parents and other influencers. As an analysis by the Nigerien government put it, "Programs that raise awareness of the damage done by child marriage can change beliefs, but without other ways of generating the benefits of child marriage, it just creates contradictions" (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, 2018). These contradictions are likely to punish the girl herself. One informant said that the "do no harm" principle requires a close examination of program outcomes. "The longer she delays being married, the worse it is for her. By intervening, we ask her to delay marriage and she has no opportunity for her life. Have we really made a difference then?" (Interview, 5/14)

Even if a program can untangle the incentives around child marriage, scaling up such a program would be difficult or impossible in an environment that does not enable economic empowerment, quality schooling, and access to health care. "Niger still has high infant mortality, high fertility to compensate for high mortality, and other regular drivers of CEFM," said one informant. "It seems like people can't imagine anything other than this norm, so it's a challenge to change CEFM in Niger" (Interview, 5/19). Continued economic crisis, extremist violence, and COVID-19 only make the environment less enabling.

While the National Platform has helped harmonize approaches to CEFM, the dynamic between INGOs and CSOs threatens to hinder programmatic progress. Both INGOs and CSOs are currently essential for programmatic success, as INGOs have the convening and advocacy power and CSOs have the connections to local communities. For sustainability, there needs to be some mechanism to enhance the capacity of CSOs so they are not dependent on INGOs to advance challenging issues at a national level.

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 Niger?

- **Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world.** While it is a very difficult environment, seriously engaging with the issue of CEFM implies taking on challenging environments. Because CEFM in Niger is primarily driven by social norms, it offers an opportunity to learn how to effectively shift risks and benefits at an individual and community level while protecting girls from additional harm. It is a nation-wide problem in Niger, and the government, while currently open to engaging on the issue, does not have the resources to address it without significant assistance.
- **Civil society organizations in Niger need increased investment and attention.** CSOs play a critical role in addressing CEFM at the local level, which is where the levers of change primarily lie. However, they are small and lack capacity and voice. An investment in strengthening CSOs, linking their community-level efforts, and evaluating their programming would help build and sustain CEFM progress.
- **Niger's CEFM solutions require changes across many sectors, but strategic entry points within a single sector can have an impact and play to donors' strengths.** Some donors have approached CEFM in Niger from an educational or sexual and reproductive health and rights perspective. Given the importance of gender norms to CEFM in Niger, it is critical to employ a gender equality lens that transects sectoral approaches. Donors can leverage existing investments in Niger on adolescent family planning, which have helped build understanding of CEFM because of links between the two issues. By addressing the social norms that drive CEFM, investing in Niger should also help donors achieve family planning and reproductive health goals, and likely other sectoral goals (i.e., maternal and newborn health).

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

- **The costed National Action Plan offers a roadmap for advocacy.** As the main voice for change on CEFM, the National Platform has an opportunity to develop a harmonized advocacy agenda to hold the government accountable to the National Action Plan. Sustaining the government's commitment on CEFM will be particularly urgent in the coming year with national elections and transition to a new president and cabinet.
- **Community level approaches that address social norms and economic vulnerability offer best hope for programmatic change.** Stand-alone educational or economic empowerment programs alone may generate additional risk and labor for vulnerable girls, and may not effectively delay marriage. Gender-intentional programming that shifts social norms and addresses families' need for a social safety net may be more effective.

- **Successful investments will engage religious and traditional leaders as well as fathers and husbands as essential influencers.** The engagement of men as influencers and decision makers is essential to shifting norms around CEFM. These local leaders likely have much more sway over villages than any political leader in Niamey. Engagement of the village leaders' association and progressive Imams will help align CEFM efforts with religious and traditional values. Fathers and husbands, as decision-makers on CEFM, are also critical to shifting norms.

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

- **Media engagement can begin to shift social norms while countering fundamentalist influence on the issue.** Radio, and to a lesser extent television, are powerful communication tools in Niger, yet journalists and the media more broadly have not been a presence on CEFM. These tools can be used to address social norms through serial programming, or pressure for political commitment through news programming. Media engagement that features local and national leaders can increase the perceived legitimacy and "Nigerien-ness" of the issue.
- **CSO leadership with INGO support can underpin the long-term effort child marriage reduction will require.** While some informants said that villagers welcome INGOs because they deliver services, others have asserted that perceived benevolence does not equal influence. As those closest to communities, CSOs are more likely to be able to design programs that respond to local needs. CSOs also must be ready for the day that this issue is not generating the same level of international attention and investment, because CEFM likely will still affect a sizeable portion of Niger's population. INGOs are fundamental in preparing CSOs for leadership in the medium term. Amplifying CSO voices and successes in the short term will also help influencers, allies and other decision-makers see demands to end CEFM as originating in Niger itself.
- **Policy change should be an advocacy priority over legal reform in Niger's current political reality.** International agreements and goals have been tremendously important to driving CEFM onto the domestic political agenda in Niger. However, advocacy strategies of international actors in Niger should also be shaped by an understanding of the limits of Niger's current political reality. Several international organizations continue to list legal reform as an advocacy objective, despite the fact that pursuing such reform could result in backlash that would harm CEFM programs and the girls themselves. Advocacy agendas should clarify that legal reform in Niger will not be a priority until there is significant Nigerien support for such a change.
- **Research should identify successful models for local action.** There are still considerable gaps in knowledge about CEFM in Niger, as discussed above. More evaluations of interventions are needed to determine what is effective in addressing child marriage at the local level in Niger. Investing in research to fill this gap would help implementers better understand how to address norms-based CEFM, lessons that could be applicable elsewhere.

- **Address difficult social norms from a “do no harm” perspective.** As noted above, CEFM is intractable in Niger in large part because decision makers and influencers derive social benefit from CEFM, as do the girls themselves, yet the risks of CEFM fall solely on the girls. The girls are also most vulnerable to unintended harm if programming is poorly designed or encounters structural obstacles. Through research, information sharing, and pilot testing, the most promising approaches can be identified for scaling.
- **Build networks and connections among villages.** Geographical clusters of CEFM imply that girls and their parents respond to what they see around them. Moreover, young people are a critical voice to identifying solutions on CEFM, and building their capacity as leaders can generate dividends on SRHR and other issues as well. One informant said he was hopeful that networks among young people could provide powerful examples of leadership, which might show parents alternative paths to adulthood. Such networks might allow young people to share strategies about successfully avoiding the social risks that can come with delayed marriage.

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APPENDIX A: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH)

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 Niger on this issue, and we greatly appreciate your input in this process. Your responses will help shape a contextual understanding of CEFM in Niger, 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 tell me a little bit about your work in Niger related to CEFM?

Foundational Factors

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

In Niger, CM does not appear to vary by **economic quintile** except for the top fifth. What do you attribute this to?

How have **ethnic differences** shaped CM and other gender issues in Niger?

Rules of the Game

Is **national law** the only relevant legal framework for CEFM in Niger?

What **international commitments** has Niger made on CEFM?

Are there **groups trying to use these international commitments** to pressure for national legal changes?

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

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

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

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

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

Who are the **current obstacles** to change on CEFM? Are there CSO or political factions dedicated to preventing change?

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

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

Is **CEFM linked with other issues** at the national level (e.g. education, sexual rights and reproductive health, gender-based violence, etc.) or addressed as a separate issue?

How do **microeconomic decisions** affect CEFM? How do **macroeconomic decisions** affect CEFM?

To what extent are **women visible** as participants in the formal labor force?

Are **women's rights/rights of girls** considered important issues in political campaigns at a national level? Regional level?

Have there been **any successful changes** on other women's rights issues recently?

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 do you think would happen **if Niger changed its law** to prohibit marriage under 18? What would be the primary implementation challenges? (Probe for any regional differences, urban/rural differences)

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

What are the limitations of their influence?

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

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?

APPENDIX B. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE (FRENCH)

Introduction: Merci beaucoup pour parler avec moi aujourd'hui. Iris Group prépare une analyse de l'économie politique sur les mariages d'enfants, précoces et forcés (CEFM) pour la Fondation Bill et Melinda Gates. Notre objectif est de développer une analyse générale du contexte du CEFM dans chacun des huit pays, comme Niger. Vous avez été recommandé en tant qu'expert au Niger sur cette question, et nous apprécions vraiment votre contribution. Vos réponses nous aideront à comprendre le contexte du CEFM au Niger, ce qui contribuera aux recommandations. Pour clarifier, vos réponses spécifiques ne vous seront pas attribuées sans votre consentement. Nous vous remercions pour vos réponses honnêtes et votre temps.

Aishwarya introduction : Je m'appelle Aishwarya et je suis un associé qui fait des recherches à Iris Group. J'assiste Mary Beth, une associée principale, parce que je parle un peu français.

For permission to record: Êtes-vous d'accord avec nous pour enregistrer cette conversation pour la traduction et la transcription?

First, can you tell me a little bit about your work in Niger related to CEFM? Pouvez-vous parler de votre travail au Niger sur le mariage des enfants précoce et forcé?

Foundational Factors

From what you know based on your work or experiences in Niger, what are the most important factors driving **regional differences** in CEFM in Niger? (probe for geographical, environmental differences) Quels sont les facteurs les plus importants qui affectent les différences régionales dans le mariage des enfants?

In Niger, CM does not appear to vary by **economic quintile** except for the top fifth. What do you attribute this to? Le mariage des enfants ne varie pas selon le quintile économique, sauf le cinquième supérieur. Pour vous, quelle en est la raison?

How have **ethnic differences** shaped CM and other gender issues in Niger? Comment les différences ethniques affectent le mariage des enfants et les normes de genre au Niger?

Rules of the Game

Is **national law** the only relevant legal framework for CEFM in Niger? La législation nationale... est-elle le seul cadre juridique pertinent pour le mariage des enfants au Niger?

What **international commitments** has Niger made on CEFM? Quels types d'engagements internationaux a Niger pris pour le mariage des enfants?

Are there **groups trying to use these international commitments** to pressure for national legal changes?

Y a-t-il des groupes qui essaient d'utiliser les engagements internationaux pour encourager des changements juridiques nationaux?

Have there been **any recent norms changes** related to gender, fertility desires, familial responsibility and sexual debut? Have these been reflected in CM rates? Y a-t-il eu récemment des changements avec les normes de genre, de fertilité, de responsabilité familiale et de débuts sexuels? Ces changements se reflètent-ils dans les taux de mariage des enfants?

Here and Now

What **global, regional or national events** have been important to CEFM in Niger in the past couple years? Quels événements mondiaux, régionaux ou nationaux ont été importants pour le mariage des enfants précoce et forcé au Niger ces dernières années?

How do you think **COVID-19** will affect CEFM and efforts to combat it? Comment la pandémie COVID-19 affectera-t-elle le mariage des enfants et les efforts pour le combattre?

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

Quels progrès ont été réalisés avec le mariage des enfants au Niger? Programmation, recherche, plaidoyer, etc

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

Quels sont les plus grands obstacles aux efforts actuels autour du mariage des enfants au Niger? Ont-ils changé depuis le passé?

Who is **empowered to act** and what help do they need to be effective? Qui est habilité à agir contre le mariage des enfants et de quelle aide ont-ils besoin pour être efficaces?

Is **CEFM linked with other issues** at the national level (e.g. education, sexual rights and reproductive health, gender-based violence, etc.) or addressed as a separate issue? Au Niger, le mariage des enfants est-il discuté à travers d'autres sujets comme l'éducation, la santé génésique, la violence basée sur le genre, ou est-il discuté comme un sujet indépendant?

Are **women's rights/rights of girls** considered important issues in political campaigns at a national level? Regional level? Les droits des femmes et des filles sont-ils considérés comme des questions importantes dans les campagnes politiques au niveau national ou régional?

Have there been **any successful changes** on other women's rights issues recently? Pouvez-vous parler des mouvements sur les droits des femmes au Niger? Y a-t-il eu récemment des changements réussis dans les droits des femmes?

Are there any actors who have an **economic interest** in change on CEFM? Any who have an economic interest in keeping things the same? Quels groupes ont un intérêt économique à changer le mariage des enfants?

Dynamics

What do you think would happen **if Niger changed its law** to prohibit marriage under 18? What would be the primary implementation challenges? (Probe for any regional differences, urban/rural differences) Si Niger modifiait sa loi pour interdire le mariage des moins de 18 ans, que se passerait-il? Serait-ce efficace?

In other West African Countries, urbanization has led to declines in CEFM. Why do you think there has been such little urbanization in Niger? Dans d'autres pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest, l'urbanisation a réduit le mariage des enfants. Pourquoi pensez-vous qu'il y a eu si peu d'urbanisation au Niger?

Who are the **key stakeholders and actors on CEFM**? (probe for donors, CSOs, policymakers, advocates)? Are there any outstanding champions on this? Quels sont les principaux acteurs qui ont un impact sur le mariage des enfants? Comme les

donateurs, les groupes de la société civile, les politiciens, les défenseurs, les champions?

Follow up : There is a perception that **INGOs do more than civil society organizations** to combat child marriage. Is this a correct judgement ? On a le sentiment que les ONG internationales font plus que les la société civile pour combattre le mariage des enfants. Est-ce un bon jugement?

How **do religious leaders and fundamentalism** affect child marriage in Niger? Can traditional leaders reduce child marriage? Comment les chefs religieux et les fondamentalistes affectent le mariage des enfants au Niger? Peuvent les chefs traditionnels réduire le mariage des enfants?

What influence do **international NGOs, institutions and donors** have on CEFM in Niger? Quelle influence les ONG, institutions et donateurs internationaux ont-ils sur le mariage des enfants au Niger?

What are the limitations of their influence? Quelles sont les limites de leur influence?

Who are the **current obstacles** to change on CEFM? Are there CSO or political factions dedicated to preventing change? Qui empêche le changement autour du mariage des enfants? Les groupes de la société civile ou les acteurs politiques s'opposent-ils au changement?

What role does **media** in Niger play in CEFM? Quel est le rôle des médias avec le mariage des enfants au Niger?

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? Pensez-vous que nous devons parler à quelqu'un d'autre pour plus d'informations? Avez-vous des documents supplémentaires qui peuvent nous aider à comprendre le contexte du mariage des enfants au Niger?

Thank you: Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et pour une excellente discussion aujourd'hui. J'ai beaucoup appris! Nous vous remercions de nous aider à mieux comprendre ce sujet.