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

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Iris Group

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020-21, Iris Group conducted a political economy analysis (PEA) of the issue of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Senegal to contextualize the work of the Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium<sup>1</sup> and to offer a high-level view of the environment for CEFM programming in the country. Through a desk review and key informant interviews, this analysis found the following:

ANALYSIS PILLAR	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<p><b>Foundational Factors</b></p> <p><i>(e.g., embedded structures, such as geography, class, ethnicity)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child marriage is highest in rural areas, particularly in the south and pockets of the north</li> <li>• Ethnic and religious disparities affect social norms underpinning child marriage, contributing to geographic differences in rates</li> <li>• Poorest quintile has highest rates of child marriage (62%) and slowest decline</li> <li>• Senegal’s political stability is comparatively high and gender inequality is comparatively lower than neighbors, with low levels of fundamentalism, but persists through patriarchal family code</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions to reduce child marriage need to be targeted geographically and culturally</li> <li>• Traditional, informal, and religious leaders hold important sway in communities most affected by CEFM</li> <li>• Senegal’s political and economic landscape is conducive to reducing child marriage, but this could change with economic crisis or if religious fundamentalism increases</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rules of the Game</b></p> <p><i>(e.g. laws, international commitments, policies, social norms)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Code establishes legal age of marriage at 16 for girls, 18 for boys; civil infraction unless girl is under 13</li> <li>• Implementation challenges include lack of birth registration, no legal sanction other than annulment</li> <li>• Government has signed relevant international agreements recognizing 18 as legal age of marriage, but has not harmonized its laws; launched African Union anti-child-marriage campaign in 2016</li> <li>• Control and fear of unmarried girls’ sexuality is tied to female genital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political will for changing law is limited, in part because social norms are more powerful</li> <li>• Addressing social and gender norms are crucial</li> <li>• Focus on legal implementation may not be good strategy because it may reinforce current legal disparity in age at marriage</li> <li>• Government embraces an international role on issue, which could be leveraged for legal change</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium was convened to facilitate coordinated action and learning among seven research, advocacy, and implementation-oriented partners. The Consortium includes: The GIRL Center at the Population Council, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, Iris Group, Fraym, the University of California San Diego’s Center on Gender Equity and Health, and Unchained At Last.

ANALYSIS PILLAR	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>mutilation (FGM), child marriage, bride price.</p>	
<p><b>Here and Now</b></p> <p><i>(e.g., current events and circumstances)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government has made some efforts on child marriage, especially through the Women’s Ministry; has not taken an ambitious stance on issue domestically</li> <li>• UNICEF regional and national programs have focused on FGM, while incorporating child marriage</li> <li>• National coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) started in 2017</li> <li>• Most programmatic interventions focus on FGM, early pregnancy, rights, norms – less on economics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased political will is needed to strengthen government response across ministries; legal reform is challenging due to fear of triggering conservative religious backlash</li> <li>• Norms-focused programs have had good success, but could better integrate economic issues given prevalence among poorest Senegalese</li> <li>• CSOs are active on issue across the country and can be leveraged for more sophisticated interventions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dynamics</b></p> <p><i>(e.g., interplay among the other pillars)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress:</b> Civil society coalition focused on child marriage and government working on national action plan; some program evaluations and increasing subregional data analysis will yield more information to drive programs; CSOs have strong background in implementing norms-changing interventions</li> <li>• <b>Obstacles:</b> Resistance to raising age of marriage is based on potential religious backlash; knowledge management among implementing organization is lacking, with limited evaluations; programs need more attention to male engagement, and more strategic approach to economic drivers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government commitment can be boosted by winning high profile support from religious groups for legal reform</li> <li>• As an interim policy goal, advocates could press for a costed national action plan; clearer commitments across ministries.</li> <li>• As new research on programs and on subregional trends is released, stakeholders should convene to ensure shared analysis and coordination</li> <li>• Implementers in Senegal have expertise in norms-changing interventions; can build on this success in areas with strong economic drivers</li> </ul>

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

### Case for Investment

- **Senegal has a favorable environment for sustainable and effective investments.** In comparison to its neighbors, Senegal’s relative environmental, economic, and political stability has created favorable conditions to address child marriage.
- **Senegal offers the possibility for a child marriage win in Francophone West Africa.** Senegal gets relatively little attention on child marriage, but investments can build on its advantages and make headway in communities that have not benefited from existing interventions.

- **Senegal’s experience offers the opportunity to test the effectiveness of “norms-forward” program design and lay the groundwork for legal change.** Senegalese implementers have long prioritized shifting gender and social norms, offering the opportunity to build in other elements – such as economic empowerment – while preserving their successful emphasis on norms.

### Key Points of Leverage in Senegal on CEFM

- **Religious leaders are an important key to driving change in the community and nationally.** Increased advocacy nationally by these leaders can help build political will for legal reform and push back against a conservative religious response.
- **Senegal has skilled and experienced civil society partners and a collaborative government, who work well together and with international partners.** Informants commented on the trust among the key actors working on child marriage, with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), CSOs, and government collaborating relatively smoothly.
- **Senegal is a regional positive outlier on youth contraceptive access and ability to talk about sexual and reproductive health.** Child marriage approaches can continue to build on decades of successful work on sexual and reproductive health access in Senegal.

### Turning Gaps into Opportunities

- **Investments in expanded research and greater knowledge management capacity are essential for effective and targeted programming.** Studies and evaluations in Senegal can also begin to address the deficit in French-language research on child marriage and related issues.
- **The National Action Plan on child marriage, if budgeted and embraced across government, can harmonize child marriage approaches and prime the country for legal change.** The plan is a critical step in enshrining government commitment to ending child marriage, which to date has been captured only through its international commitments.
- **Child marriage projects should pilot evidence-based integration of economic components.** Projects that address social norms and schooling alone may only go so far in reducing child marriage in parts of the country where poverty is a strong force maintaining the status quo. Adolescent girls need to be able to aspire realistically to viable options outside of marriage.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 2020-21, Iris Group conducted a political economy analysis (PEA) of the issue of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Senegal to contextualize the work of the Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium<sup>2</sup> and to offer a high-level view of the environment for CEFM programming in the country. The ultimate purpose of this analysis is to provide macro-level context for the findings from learning consortium investments.

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

Iris Group assessed the findings using four angles of analysis:

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

This report presents the CEFM context in Senegal, 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 Senegal.

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



### III. CONTEXT

Senegal is a part of the Sahel, a group of African countries on the southern edge of the Sahara which face unique drought-related and economic challenges, the evolving needs of a growing population of urban youth, increasing social and religious tensions, and increasing geopolitical instability (Eizenga, 2019). Among other Sahelian countries, Senegal is the most politically stable state and has the highest economic growth, having avoided the regional security shocks and rising insecurity seen in neighboring countries (World Bank, 2020a). Overall, Senegal is ranked 164 out of 189 countries and territories per the 2017 Human Development Index, placing it in the low human development category (UNDP, 2018). Youth unemployment has been rising since 2018, even though total unemployment has remained relatively stable since 2015 (World Bank, 2020b).

Despite Senegal's stability, women's access to land, financing mechanisms, markets, means of production, contraception, sexual and reproductive health services, and other assets remains limited (UN Women, n.d.). Senegal is ranked 124 out of 160 countries in the 2017 Gender Inequality Index, reflecting substantial gender-based inequalities in reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity (UNDP, 2018). The continued practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), high prevalence of lifetime domestic violence for women, and other sociocultural restrictions are detrimental to the physical integrity, civil liberties, health, and wellbeing of women and girls (OECD Development Centre, 2019). However, Senegal also has made numerous strides to address gender inequality. The constitution guarantees equality between men and women and key legal frameworks have been established to protect women's rights (Petroni et al., 2017). In 2017, Senegal was 7<sup>th</sup> globally in terms of number of women in parliament, although the country lags in terms of women's political participation at the local level (OECD Development Centre, 2019). Women's contributions to socioeconomic growth, especially in rural areas and the agricultural sector, have been receiving greater recognition (UN Women, n.d.).

As of 2019,<sup>3</sup> 31 percent of Senegalese women aged 20-24 were married before 18 years and 9 percent before 15 years (Save the Children, n.d.). Over the past 20 years, the average national prevalence of child marriage has decreased by 16 percentage points in Senegal, bringing it well below the regional average of 42 percent (Save the Children, 2017). Its remarkable progress stands out in a region where countries such as Niger and Burkina Faso have had limited success. However, Senegal's rate of progress needs to increase by 1.5 percent to meet SDG elimination targets by 2030 (Save the Children, 2017). Women get married at a much younger average age than men, with a median age at first marriage of 20.4 years for women and 26.3 years for men aged 25-49 (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD) & ICF, 2018). As of the 2010 DHS, 23 percent of Senegal's girl child marriages were among those 13 and younger, the second highest proportion among 11 African countries (Maswikwa et al., 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Senegal has been conducting continuous DHS surveys since 2017, and the national and regional data on child marriage has fluctuated significantly each year from 2017-2019, and not consistently.

# IV. FINDINGS

## A. Foundational Factors

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

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child marriage is highest in rural areas, particularly in the south and pockets of the north</li> <li>• Ethnic and religious disparities affect social norms underpinning child marriage, contributing to geographic differences in rates</li> <li>• Poorest quintile has highest rates of child marriage (62%) and slowest decline</li> <li>• Senegal’s political stability is comparatively high and gender inequality is comparatively lower than neighbors, with low levels of fundamentalism, but persists through patriarchal family code</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions to reduce child marriage need to be targeted geographically and culturally</li> <li>• Traditional, informal, and religious leaders hold important sway in communities most affected by CEFM</li> <li>• Senegal’s political and economic landscape is conducive to reducing CEFM, but this could change with economic crisis or if religious fundamentalism increases</li> </ul>

Senegal has high regional variability in its child marriage rates, which the literature and informants attributed primarily to differential access to education, economic opportunities, family planning and concepts of gender equality and empowerment. Rates of child marriage are three times higher in rural areas (42.8%) than urban settings (14.3%), and Dakar has the lowest rate nationwide (9%) (Save the Children, n.d.). Senegal’s relatively low rural population (56.6%) in comparison to other Sahelian countries may be one reason its child marriage rates are lower overall (Morgan, 2016). Migration to urban areas has provided alternatives to marriage for girls and their families, with improved access to schools and employment (Petroni et al., 2017). One informant said that despite the lack of anti-child marriage programming in urban areas, “people are more exposed to awareness-raising, education opportunities, human rights, gender issues, etc. (Interview, 1/4b).

Southeastern Senegal has the highest child marriage rates in the country, with Kolda appearing

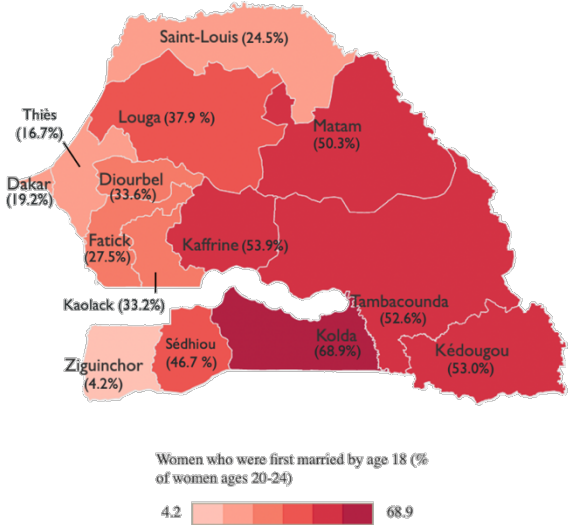


Figure 1: Child Marriage Rates by Region; based on 2019 DHS



to be the highest at 69 percent (Save the Children, n.d.). Informants also pointed out that northern regions have communities with similarly high rates, even if the region overall has a low rate (Interview 12/7). Ethnic and religious difference shape child marriage in Senegal, particularly in rural areas. Wolof, the dominant group politically, and Fullah are the two largest ethnic groups, comprising approximately 37 and 26 percent of the population, respectively (CIA, 2021). While Wolof people tend to live in urban centers and in western and northern Senegal (Keese, 2019), the pastorally based Fullah are distributed across the country. Without subregional data, it is difficult to overlay geography, ethnicity, and child marriage rates. Internal migration and intermarriage confound any geographic patterns related to child marriage and ethnicity.

Ethnic variations uncovered by a Plan study in peri-urban and rural southeast and northwest Senegal found:

- Bassari and Bedick girls, along with Wolof girls in urban settings, tended to marry after 18;
- Fullah and Diakhanke girls were “betrothed” as infants and generally married at onset of menses;
- Pastoral parents encourage boys to marry young so they can move with animals; first wives must be a first cousin;
- Child marriage among Fullahs existed before conversion to Islam, and in fact is higher among those Fullahs that are not Muslim;
- Diakhankes and Wolofs first wives can be of any family of the same social caste (Morgan 2016).

Almost all Senegalese are Muslim, and the Plan study concluded that “religious affiliation is not the main driver of child marriage;” rather, cultural traditions prevail. In collectivist societies, families and guardians of cultural norms decide on child marriage; the extent to which religious leaders, who perform these weddings, have influence on the decision varies. At the same time, Islamic religious leaders in Senegal have for the most part not opposed child marriage, as it is compatible with prohibitions on premarital sex (Morgan, 2016). One informant noted that religious leaders in Kolda have participated in marriages of 12- and 13-year-old girls, and have resisted religious arguments against the practice (Interview, 12/9). Another informant said that religious justification of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage depends on the region, saying, “especially in the north, religious communities advocate for these harmful traditions,” while in the south “religious influence is still there, but it is more attributable to culture” (Interview, 1/4b).

Girls in the poorest households are much more susceptible to marrying before 18. The poorest girls have a 62 percent rate of child marriage – twice the national average, and over 6 times the rate in the highest quintile – and progress has been slow among this population (Save the Children, n.d.). On the other hand, Senegalese men typically pay a bride price prior to marriage, and there is evidence that economic crisis and youth unemployment contribute to marriage delays (Fenn et al., 2015a). Economic migration by girls and young women to urban areas has given them alternatives to marriage and greater autonomy (Petroni et al., 2017).

Senegal benefits from relative economic, and political stability in comparison to its neighbors. One informant noted that a “religiously tolerant” society has allowed more freedom to girls in urban areas, and the government’s pride in modernized schools has offered girls increased opportunity (Interview, 12/14). At the same time, gender inequality persists in Senegal, underpinning the connected practices of child marriage, polygyny, and FGM, particularly in rural areas (US Department of State, 2019). Systemic gender inequality sustains the belief that women and girls are primarily important for domestic labor, and their value is determined by their sexual purity before marriage (Morgan, 2016). Patriarchal norms are codified in the family code, which gives fathers primary authority over children and decision-making control over household matters, such as where to live (OECD Development Centre, 2019). Women can only head a household if their husband is incapacitated or has renounced his control (US Department of State, 2019). Informants agreed that gender power dynamics are critical, with one saying child marriage is “mostly about gender inequality” (Interview, 12/3) and another commenting, “[CEFM] is a gender issue and a power issue, with people wanting to maintain the status quo of women not deciding on her sexuality” (Interview, 1/4b).

## B. Rules of the Game

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

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Code establishes legal age of marriage at 16 for girls, 18 for boys; civil infraction unless girl is under 13</li> <li>Implementation challenges include lack of birth registration, no legal sanction other than annulment</li> <li>Government has signed relevant international agreements recognizing 18 as legal age of marriage, but has not harmonized its laws; launched African Union anti-child-marriage campaign in 2016</li> <li>Control and fear of unmarried girls’ sexuality is tied to FGM, child marriage, bride price.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political will for changing law is limited, in part because social norms are more powerful</li> <li>Addressing social and gender norms are crucial</li> <li>Focus on legal implementation may not be good strategy because it may reinforce current legal disparity in age at marriage</li> <li>Government embraces an international role on issue, which could be leveraged for legal change</li> </ul>

Senegal’s Family Code (2000) sets the age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys, and supports polygynous marriages (men can have up to four wives concurrently), although the man must register his intent to marry more than one woman before the first marriage (OECD Development Centre, 2019). The law recognizes equal rights in entering marriage, and mandates consent for marriage by both parties, “even if the spouse is a minor” (OECD Development Centre, 2019). According to an analysis by Guttmacher, Senegal’s marriage laws are inconsistent, because marriage for both boys and girls under 18 is allowed only with parental consent, but is legal for girls at age 16 (Maswikwa et al., 2015). Child marriage is a

criminal offense only if the girl is under 13 and the husband has raped her; otherwise, it is a civil offense resulting in annulment (OECD Development Centre, 2019). FGM has been illegal since 1999 (OECD Development Centre, 2019).

Application of child marriage laws suffers from a number of implementation issues in Senegal. Birth registration is not mandatory and requires both a fee and travel to a registration office (US Department of State, 2019), so it is “sometimes nonexistent or poorly done,” according to one informant (Interview, 12/3). Although Senegal is secular, the law recognizes but does not regulate religious and customary marriages (OECD Development Centre, 2019). The government has created a mechanism to capture cases of child marriage, but as of 2016, very few local surveillance committees had been established (Morgan, 2016). A Plan study found that participants knew about the legal age, but the lack of legal sanction made the law irrelevant in their lives (Morgan, 2016). Laws against FGM have similar problems. An informant says that this law is clear and widely understood, but not well implemented or enforced. In fact, since the law was passed, fewer than 30 cases have reached tribunals nationally (Interview, 1/4b).

Senegal has affirmed the main human rights and other international agreements that recognize 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage, but has not taken measures to harmonize its laws with these commitments (Save the Children, 2017). Despite the inconsistency, an informant noted the importance of the government’s regional leadership on the issue, as it launched the African Union campaign in 2016. The informant commented, “There are many international agreements and charters that Senegal has signed saying child marriage will not be tolerated. This is crucial for us and helps our movement. The national law and signed agreements should not be different” (Interview 12/7).

Informants agreed with the literature that gender and social norms hold more sway over people’s behaviors around child marriage and related issues than Senegal’s weak laws. One informant said, “The child marriage, FGM, and early pregnancy rates are all linked to cultural norms” (Interview, 1/4a). Relevant beliefs and practices related to gender and social norms in Senegal’s context include:

Legal power is not as powerful as social pressure.

*Interview, 1/4a*

- **Control over girls’ sexuality and taboos against premarital sex for girls:** Virginity among unmarried girls is highly valued and enforced, connected to family honor, and a primary reason for early marriage (da Silva, 2013). Senegalese girls report an average age at first sex very close to age at first marriage (19.4 and 19.9) (Fenn et al., 2015b). For Fullahs, Diakhankes, and Wolofs, certification of virginity forms a part of the marriage ceremony, as crowds gather to witness the husband’s display of a bloodied sheet. Lack of blood means loss of half of the bride price and social scorn (Morgan, 2016)
- **Polygamy:** A 2016 study found that “23 percent of married men and 35 percent of married women are engaged in polygamous unions” (OECD Development Centre, 2019). Such unions are linked to child marriage, as men seek younger second, third or

fourth wives to produce children. According to a UNICEF report, “girls married before 18 are 1.7 times more likely to be in a polygamous union” (Fenn et al., 2015a).

- **FGM:** One-quarter of women have experienced FGM, which persists despite illegality and programs to combat it due to strong beliefs that girls who do not undergo FGM are spiritually at risk, thereby endangering their families and communities (OECD Development Centre, 2019; UNICEF Data, n.d.)
- **Violence against Women:** Gender-based violence is seen as socially acceptable, considered a private family matter, and many consider it condoned by Islam (OECD Development Centre, 2019) (Terman, 2013)
- **Family Ties:** Bride price is the custom in Senegal, but preserving family ties may outweigh the delivery of gifts to the bride’s family. If a groom cannot afford these gifts, there are reports that the marriage may go forward, with bride price to be paid later (Morgan, 2016). While many cite economic stability as a reason that young girls might want to marry, “the key underlying issue was that marriage itself is seen as one of the most important institutions in society” (Terman, 2013).
- **Bride kidnapping:** Abduction of girls is a custom among Fullahs in the Diery region, with pressure to marry after the girls are raped by the kidnapper, although some regional leaders assert this practice is ending (Morgan, 2016)

One informant commented, “We believe people’s behaviors need to change before the law does...We need to be working with communities to identify the barriers to change because these will not necessarily change just because the law says so” (Interview, 12/7).

### C. Here and Now

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

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government has made some efforts on child marriage, especially through the Women’s Ministry; has not taken an ambitious stance on issue domestically</li> <li>• UNICEF regional and national programs have focused on FGM, while incorporating child marriage</li> <li>• National coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) has operated since 2017</li> <li>• Most programmatic interventions focus on FGM, early pregnancy, rights, norms – less on economics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased political will is needed to strengthen government response across ministries; legal reform is challenging due to fear of triggering conservative religious backlash</li> <li>• Norms-focused programs have had good success, but could better integrate economic issues given prevalence among poorest Senegalese</li> <li>• CSOs are active on issue across the country and can be leveraged for more sophisticated interventions</li> </ul>

CEFM Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
Federal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government hosted first African Summit on Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage in Dakar in 2019 (UN Women, 2019)</li> <li>• Child marriage included as a child protection issue in the government’s National Strategy for the Protection of Childhood in 2012; in 2014 declared an “educational approach” to ending child marriage (Morgan, 2016)</li> <li>• Ministry of Women, Family and Children is primary government body overseeing child marriage efforts; initiated efforts to revise Children’s Code, raise age to 18 (Interview, 12/7); has a gender equality directorate (US Department of State, 2019)</li> <li>• Ministry of Justice has worked with NGOs on FGM law implementation (OECD Development Centre, 2019), assists on child marriage legal reform (Interview, 12/7)</li> <li>• Informants say government could show more political will on issue, but there are no tensions between government and civil society (Interviews, 12/3, 12/14, 1/4b)</li> <li>• National Action Plan on child marriage is “still being finalized” (Interview, 11/25)</li> </ul>
Province/Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local governments partnered with NGOs to form child protection committees on child marriage, FGM but there is limited reach (Morgan, 2016); Local and regional governments have participated in ceremonies recognizing communities for anti-FGM and anti-child marriage efforts</li> </ul>
Private, Bilateral and Multilateral Donors (partial list)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNICEF and UNFPA have led joint program against FGM in Senegal, helping government develop national action plan to end FGM by 2030 (OECD Development Centre, 2019); They are working on a new strategy to address FGM “which will hopefully also address CEFM” (Interview, 1/4b); UNICEF Senegal works on girls’ education, entrepreneurship, skill building (Interview, 12/14);</li> <li>• UNICEF’s regional office has prioritized FGM over child marriage in Senegal due to higher rates in other countries, not a Global Programme country (Interview, 12/14); UNICEF regional office will be analyzing sub-regional data trends on child marriage in Senegal in 2021 (Interview, 12/14)</li> <li>• Dutch Foreign Ministry funds child marriage alliance Her Choice in Senegal and other countries; includes University of Amsterdam as research partner; evaluations after 5 years of interventions starting now (Interview, 12/3)</li> <li>• According to one informant, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has good strategies, but “doesn’t have the capacity to implement its strategies nor the political connectivity to do so. It needs a lot of hand holding.” (Interview, 12/14)</li> </ul>
International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tostan conducted a project from 2000-2006 on FGM, with child marriage as target; 2008 evaluation found unclear impact on child marriage, although a small decrease in FGM and improved use of health services (Freccero &amp; Whiting, 2018); It implements its Community Empowerment Program in 19 communities; the government has centered Tostan’s approach in its national FGM action plan (Tostan International, n.d.)</li> </ul>

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE/POSITION ON CEFM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save the Children, Amnesty International, World Vision have conducted child protection campaigns, including human rights education/clubs and protection groups</li> <li>• Pathfinder, IntraHealth, MSI and EquiPop, among others, have worked on adolescent sexual and reproductive health</li> </ul>
Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National coalition of civil society formed in 2017 with 32 organizations, with a main goal of ending child marriage; work with Ministry of Women on recommendations for national action plan; leads campaigns on preventing early marriages (Interview, 11/25)</li> <li>• Enda Jeunesse Action works to build child-marriage-free communities and advocates for legal reform (Interview, 12/3)</li> <li>• Group de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal (GREFELS) was first Senegalese women’s organization to define child marriage as violence; led efforts against violence against women starting in 1998; has member organizations in most regions; research includes FGM, child marriage, sexual violence (Terman, 2013)</li> <li>• Grandmothers Project implements “Girls’ Holistic Development Program” that addresses child marriage, teen pregnancy, FGM through intergenerational dialogues and social norms change in Kolda region (Grandmothers Project 2020)</li> </ul>
Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imams have been engaged in local efforts as key influencers (da Silva, 2013). National organizations Islam and Population Network and Alliance of Religious People for Health and Population educate religious and traditional leaders (interview, 12/9)</li> <li>• Politically powerful, conservative religious families and groups have publicly supported FGM and child marriage as important for preserving traditional values (Interview, 12/7)</li> </ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media has been primarily used to publicize NGO activities and conduct “edutainment”; has not engaged on child marriage independently (Interviews 12/7, 12/14b)</li> </ul>
Individual Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts like Grandmothers Project have successfully engaged “adolescents, parents, elders, traditional community and religious leaders, local health workers and teachers” to advocate for girls’ rights (Grandmothers Project 2020).</li> </ul>

### Strategic Links with Other Issues

Programs that address child marriage in Senegal appear to connect the issue to FGM and sexual and reproductive health most frequently. Despite the high prevalence of child marriage among the poorest Senegalese, there do not appear to be many programs that build economic opportunities for girls.

	Opportunities	Challenges
FGM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FGM is often a precursor to child marriage; seen as linked by government, CSOs, communities</li> <li>• Clear and well understood laws facilitate approach to FGM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FGM and child marriage are linked to ideas of virtue, especially among religious groups</li> <li>• Politically powerful religious groups oppose change on FGM, child marriage</li> </ul>



	Opportunities	Challenges
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schooling delays marriage, especially secondary schooling</li> <li>• Senegal's government prioritizes modern education (Interview, 12/14a)</li> <li>• Schools can connect girls to protection programs (Interview 12/14b)</li> <li>• Emphasis on increasing education helped increase the average age at first marriage (Petroni et al., 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on schooling alone may not work: Senegalese girls who get pregnant almost universally drop out of school (Petroni et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Sexual harassment is among causes for drop out; not typically reported (US Department of State, 2019)</li> <li>• Schools have infrastructure, staffing issues</li> <li>• Marriage often is the cause of school drop out, rather than the reverse (Morgan, 2016)</li> </ul>
Economic Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enda Jeunesse Action works with mothers on economic empowerment so they can keep their daughters in school (Interview, 12/7)</li> <li>• Senegal's infrastructure (roads, markets) can boost possibilities for economic empowerment activities (Interview, 12/14)</li> <li>• In its list of recommended approaches, Save the Children includes economic subsidies as an important aspect (Freccero &amp; Whiting, 2018)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all of the Grandmothers Project's initiatives aimed at alleviating economic issues have prospered due to "a lack of social unity;" they see social cohesion, intra-community communication, and the presence of democratic leadership that can help communities mobilize as prerequisites for economic interventions (Interview, 1/4a)</li> <li>• There is a lack of awareness about/interest in benefits of investing in daughters. Parents benefit from bride price, and marriage is seen as optimal economic option for girls (Interview, 12/3)</li> </ul>
Gender Norms and Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A community-based approach to changing gender norms gets at the root of problem, and can address multiple interconnected issues (Interview, 1/4a)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing gender norms alone does not resolve structural issues</li> <li>• Norms-based interventions may take time to see results</li> <li>• Marriage is seen as a family and social concern, not a legal or rights issue (Coulibaly-Tandian, 2020)</li> </ul>
Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age at first marriage and age at first sex are both increasing, but increase in age at first sex is a flatter rise (Petroni et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Access to contraception "very likely contributed to delayed marriage in Senegal" (Petroni et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Save the Children found it easier to discuss early pregnancy as driver of child marriage in Senegal than in other countries (Freccero &amp; Whiting, 2018)</li> <li>• Diverse programs have built access to SRH services for adolescent girls; SRH community actors like relays and the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some communities have no health centers to access contraception (Interview 12/7)</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Challenges
<i>badiénous gox</i> play a role in reaching vulnerable communities	

### Effects of COVID-19 on CEFM

Informants indicated that they do not have clear evidence yet for the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage rates. One informant said that in the areas they work in, they had conducted an unofficial survey and found no early marriages in their program areas, but that regions outside their intervention reported more cases. “In interviewing parents, they either needed the money from marrying their daughter or felt that the girls had too much freedom now that school was closed,” the informant said. The respondent also described an unpublished recent study on early pregnancies during the pandemic, which found a spike in Dakar and southern regions (Interview, 1/4a).

An informant said that school closures have been challenging for girls and child marriage programs, and that they were hearing for increasing incidents of rape. The informant said, “We are working on a study in fact on child marriage rates in high-risk regions, although COVID-19 has made that hard” (Interview, 11/25). Another noted that violence against women tends to increase during emergencies, and that access to sexual and reproductive health services is likely more limited (Interview, 12/14b).

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

KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress:</b> Civil society coalition focused on child marriage and government working on national action plan; some program evaluations and increasing subregional data analysis will yield more information to drive programs; CSOs have strong background in implementing norms-changing interventions</li> <li>• <b>Obstacles:</b> Resistance to raising age of marriage is based on potential religious backlash; knowledge management among implementing organization is lacking, with limited evaluations; programs need more attention to male engagement, and more strategic approach to economic drivers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government commitment can be boosted by winning high profile support from religious groups for legal reform</li> <li>• As an interim policy goal, advocates could press for a costed national action plan; clearer commitments across ministries.</li> <li>• As new research on programs and on subregional trends is released, stakeholders should convene to ensure shared analysis and coordination</li> <li>• Implementers in Senegal have expertise in norms-changing interventions; can build on this success in areas with strong economic drivers</li> </ul>

## Areas of Progress

**Advocacy** efforts have succeeded in raising awareness and commitment to reducing child marriage among government leaders at the national and local level. International and civil society pressure has facilitated Senegal's support for regional child marriage declarations and the development of a national action plan. Government leaders look to and depend on civil society's advocacy on issues of child marriage, as they see changing the age of marriage as a politically delicate issue that requires public backing (Interview, 12/9). The formation of a national coalition of CSOs working on child marriage is particularly encouraging, as is their ability to influence the government's national action plan on the issue. Advocates have successfully attracted local leaders to celebrate child-marriage-free communities, and one organization has helped 23 villages adopt a charter on eradicating child marriage (Interview, 12/7). Another has trained local officials on the national and international laws related to child marriage (Terman, 2013). One program has girls act as "ambassadors" to advocate for legal changes and to help in awareness efforts (Interview, 11/25). Local level advocacy in Senegal also includes convincing religious leaders to preach and act in opposition to child marriage.

**Research** efforts are beginning to show more promise, with more important studies on the horizon. A 2008 evaluation of Tostan's 2000-2006 intervention provided some insight on norms-based programming in communities. The Grandmothers Project has built on this, with Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health conducting a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of their results (Grandmothers Project, 2020). The UNICEF WCARO office is delving into subregional data trends related to child marriage in 2021, and continuous DHS surveys have helped fill time gaps in child marriage data.

In terms of **programs**, Senegal has benefited from several projects focused on norms and behavior change. The Grandmothers Project has successfully changed norms by educating grandmothers and elevating their leadership role in communities (Interview, 1/4b). A project by the African Institute for Research and Development (RAID) significantly increased understanding that consummation of early marriage constitutes rape (Coulibaly-Tandian 2020). The government has set up some protection committees, and Senegalese organizations have set up others to educate and engage participants and defend adolescent girls against child marriage. A few of these projects also include efforts to support schooling and income generation. Mass education campaigns and "edutainment" have leveraged social and traditional media to reach a wide swath of the population. UNICEF is working with Georgetown University to develop a guidebook for engaging communities in constructive dialogue on these issues.

## Obstacles to Progress

**Advocacy** success is limited by the lack of prioritization of child marriage, as Senegal's relatively low rates of the practice have meant that donor and government attention are focused elsewhere. While the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children has been responsive to civil society, other ministries have not been engaged in the fight against child marriage. The national action plan is promising, but does not appear to be costed. Civil society advocates are frustrated with the government's political timidity and slow pace in harmonizing international

commitments with national laws. At the same time, concerns about provoking religious opposition are clearly warranted, particularly given violent fundamentalism in other parts of the region. Efforts to increase opposition to child marriage and FGM among religious leaders – or at least neutralize their support – are critical to easing the path to legal reform, but they do not appear to have advanced beyond the community level. One informant also asserted that advocacy groups are not “politically savvy” in getting reform through Parliament (Interview, 12/14a). Another said that young people need to be elevated as decision-makers, instead of tokens to be showcased at select moments (Interview, 1/4b).

While new **research** and data sources are emerging, subregional data, implementation research, and program evaluations are scarce, giving implementers limited evidence to use in designing or adjusting interventions. One informant said, “Many local organizations do not document their approach and their evaluation of what they’re doing. Local organizations are weak on knowledge management” (Interview, 1/4b). None of the implementers interviewed pointed to evidence-based economic interventions to combat child marriage, for example, and none of the reviewed evaluations assessed an economic component. French-language research on adolescent girls is also scarce, according to one informant. “There is a publication bias in Francophone literature,” she said (Interview, 12/14a). Research is also needed to help advocacy efforts; one informant urged studying “how to communicate with chiefs and administrative authorities” to lay the groundwork for speedy implementation of eventual legal changes (Interview, 12/9).

Another informant said French language also makes it difficult for attracting support for **programs** from donors and large INGOs. “French is a bit of an impediment to growing international commitment in Senegal,” this informant said (Interview, 12/3). Aside from the French barriers, a Save the Children analysis found that interventions “are not coordinated across regions, sectors or programme implementors, and are not monitored and evaluated collectively” (Save the Children, 2017). Programs run by international organizations may also face resistance, as some communities see FGM and child marriage interventions as “aggression towards their own ways, habits, traditions, and practice,” said one informant (Interview, 1/4b). Authenticity of the implementing organization is thus crucial to success, so the messaging is not simply to end their core traditions and beliefs. Programs should also more thoughtfully address economic need, as integration of life skills or economic empowerment components appears piecemeal. While one informant praised Grandmothers Project’s approach in lifting up elder women as influencers, she also expressed some skepticism that grandmothers are the ultimate influencers, advocating for better male engagement in child marriage projects to get to the source of patriarchal beliefs. She also said that projects could be better coordinated, as sometimes projects work on child marriage in the same community but with conflicting messages (Interview, 1/4b).

## 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 Senegal?

- **Senegal has a favorable environment for sustainable and effective investments.** In comparison to its neighbors, Senegal's relative environmental, economic, and political stability has created favorable conditions to address child marriage. "If you contrast [Senegal] with Niger and Burkina Faso," one informant said, "it is politically very stable. You can discuss things with the government and things will endure for the long-term" (Interview, 12/14a). Interventions can benefit from Senegal's relatively strong infrastructure, such as roads and markets.
- **Senegal offers the possibility for a child marriage win in Francophone West Africa.** Senegal gets relatively little attention on child marriage because its rates are lower than its Sahelian neighbors, and because attention and investment tend to focus outside of Francophone Africa. Because of its strong background in norms-changing programming and its relative political stability, investments here have the potential to build on its advantages and make headway in communities that have not benefited from existing interventions. Lessons could prove useful for other countries and communities in the Sahel region.
- **Senegal's experience offers the opportunity to test the effectiveness of "norms-forward" program design and lay the groundwork for legal change.** Unlike in many other countries which are grappling with child marriage, Senegalese implementers have long prioritized shifting gender and social norms, including around adolescent girls' sexuality. This could give them the ability to build in other elements – such as economic empowerment – while scaling up and preserving their successful emphasis on norms. Community conversations, including those championed by Tostan's Community Empowerment Program, will be fundamental to success for parents, elders, and young people themselves to accept 18 as the legal age of marriage.

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

- **Religious leaders are an important key to driving change in the community and nationally.** Informants and the literature mentioned several examples of Imams stepping in to oppose early marriages following education campaigns. Increased advocacy nationally by these leaders can help build political will for legal reform and push back against a conservative religious response. Senegalese organizations working with religious leaders, such as the Islam and Population Network, are well positioned to augment the voice of progressive imams. Cross-border collaboration could also be useful for sharing approaches and lessons; the Alliance of Religious People for Health and Population is networked with sister organizations in 9 West African countries.
- **Senegal has skilled and experienced civil society partners and a collaborative government, who work well together and with international partners.** Informants commented on the trust among the key actors working on child marriage, with INGOs, CSOs, and government collaborating relatively smoothly. This trust greatly facilitates advocacy and program

implementation, and with appropriate encouragement, can be leveraged into a cohesive and ambitious strategy to advance gender equality.

- **Senegal is a regional outlier on youth contraceptive access and ability to talk about sexual and reproductive health.** Child marriage approaches can continue to build on decades of successful work on sexual and reproductive health access in Senegal.

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

- **Investments in expanded research and greater knowledge management capacity are essential for effective and targeted programming.** Much more can be learned about the wide regional variations in child marriage rates, which likely mask significant subregional variation as well. Implementing organizations, especially smaller groups, also need resources to capture their programs' design and results. Sharing this knowledge through stakeholder convenings will help build common understanding and feed informed strategies. Studies and evaluations in Senegal can also begin to address the deficit in French-language research on child marriage and related issues.
- **The National Action Plan on child marriage, if budgeted and embraced across government, can harmonize child marriage approaches and prime the country for legal change.** The plan is a critical step in enshrining government commitment to ending child marriage, which to date has been captured only through its international commitments. To be effective, the plan must be costed, and include planning and investment of human resources across Senegal's government, not just the Ministry for Women, Family and Children. Civil society advocates must have the resources to play an important role in implementing the plan, as they have the boldness and skill to push the agenda forward at the community level.
- **Child marriage projects should pilot evidence-based integration of economic components.** Projects that address social norms and schooling alone may only go so far in reducing child marriage in parts of the country where poverty is a strong force maintaining the status quo. Adolescent girls need to be able to aspire realistically to viable options outside of marriage, an especially urgent need in the wake of COVID-19's economic crisis. Implementers should look to bring in evidence from successful economic empowerment components from other countries' child marriage programming and adapt it to Senegal's context.



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## APPENDIX A. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

### KII Interview Guide – Senegal

**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). Notre objectif est de développer une analyse générale du contexte du CEFM dans chacun des huit pays, comme Senegal. Vous avez été recommandé en tant qu'expert au Senegal sur cette question, et nous apprécions vraiment votre contribution. Vos réponses nous aideront à comprendre le contexte du CEFM au Senegal, 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 Senegal related to CEFM?  
Pour commencer, pouvez-vous parler de votre travail au Senegal sur le mariage des enfants précoce et forcé?

#### Foundational Factors

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

Quels sont les facteurs les plus importants qui affectent les différences régionales dans le mariage des enfants?

In what ways, if any, does **economic class** influence CEFM rates and practices in Senegal? Comment la classe économique influence-t-elle les taux de mariage précoce et forcé des enfants et les pratiques au Senegal?

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

#### Rules of the Game

How does Senegal law affect CEFM?

Comment la loi du Senegal affecte-t-elle le mariage précoce et forcé des enfants?

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

Comment les engagements internationaux affectent-ils les lois ou la politique au Senegal sur le mariage précoce et forcé des enfants?

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

Quelles sont les normes sociales les plus courantes liées au mariage précoce et forcé des enfants? Quelle est la différence dans sa manifestation entre les groupes ethniques?

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**

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?

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

Quel est le rôle des droits des femmes et des groupes de jeunes sur cette question au Senegal?

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

Quelle influence les ONG, institutions et donateurs internationaux ont-ils sur le mariage des enfants au Senegal?

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

Pensez-vous que les progrès sur cette question sont principalement tirés par des

acteurs hors du Senegal ou à l'intérieur du Senegal? Y a-t-il des tensions entre les acteurs externes et internes? Les communautés y voient-elles un problème d'origine nationale?

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

Quel est le rôle des médias avec le mariage des enfants au Senegal?

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 Senegal, 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 ? Quels sont les avantages et les inconvénients de parler du mariage des enfants à travers ces sujets?

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

Quels événements mondiaux, régionaux ou nationaux ont été importants pour le mariage des enfants précoce et forcé au Senegal ces dernières années?

### **Dynamics**

Where are the gaps (like in programming, research, advocacy) on this subject? How can we convert these gaps into opportunities?

Où sont les lacunes (comme dans la programmation, la recherche, le plaidoyer) sur ce sujet? Comment convertir ces lacunes en opportunités?

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

Quels progrès ont été réalisés avec le mariage des enfants au Senegal?

Programmation, recherche, plaidoyer, etc

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

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

**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.

*Follow-up*

*Debrief*