

**Delaying Child Marriage in the World's Most Afflicted Country:
Evaluating Whether or Not Ethiopia's 'Berhane Hewan' Intervention Program
Could Be Replicated with Success in Niger**

Anna Chulack
Advisor: Catherine Admay, J.D.
November 2020

Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Sanford School of Public Policy
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisors, Professor Catherine Admay and Dr. Alison Hagy, for their advice, support and time throughout the production of this work. In a time of great uncertainty, their guidance proved particularly meaningful, and the completion of this project during the COVID-19 pandemic would not have been possible without them. Thank you also to each of my interviewees for taking the time to share their expertise and insights in the child marriage field with me.

Table of Contents

I. ABSTRACT	5
II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	6
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTION.....	8
3. BACKGROUND	8
(i) <i>Niger’s Demographics</i>	8
(ii) <i>Conflict and Stability in Niger</i>	10
(iii) <i>Prevalence of Child Marriage in Niger</i>	11
(iv) <i>Effects of Child Marriage in Niger</i>	11
(v) <i>Family Law in Niger and Government Commitments to Eliminate Child Marriage (Stated, Policy, and Legal)</i>	12
(vi) <i>Previous Intervention Efforts in Niger</i>	14
(vii) <i>Ethiopia’s Berhane Hewan Program</i>	15
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	15
1. LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION.....	16
2. TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS AND PATRIARCHAL VALUES	17
3. OTHER CULTURAL NORMS	18
4. HOUSEHOLD POVERTY	19
IV. METHODS.....	20
1. RESEARCH DESIGN	20
2. PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION.....	21
3. DOCUMENT REVIEW AND SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION	22
4. DATA ANALYSIS	23
5. LIMITATIONS.....	24
V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	24
1. POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS	25
2. TYPES OF CHILD MARRIAGE.....	27
3. DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE	28
(i) <i>Lack of Access to Education</i>	29
(ii) <i>Traditional Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values</i>	30
(iii) <i>Other Cultural Norms</i>	32
(iv) <i>Household Poverty</i>	34
4. ANTI-CHILD MARRIAGE LEGISLATION.....	35
5. CRITERIA FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION PROGRAM	38
(i) <i>The Tailoring of Programs</i>	38
(ii) <i>Partnerships with Local Government and Community Leaders</i>	39
(iii) <i>Sustainable Program Cost and Funding</i>	40
6. FEASIBILITY FOR SUCCESS OF BERHANE HEWAN IN NIGER	42
VI. CONCLUSION.....	45
1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	45
2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	47
(i) <i>Short-term</i>	47
(ii) <i>Medium-term</i>	48
(iii) <i>Long-term</i>	48
3. FUTURE RESEARCH	49
VII. REFERENCES	50
VIII. APPENDIX	55

TABLE 1: AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE DATA BY AGE GROUP AMONG WOMEN IN NIGER AGED 15-49 (NIGER DHS, 2012).....	55
TABLE 2: NIGER'S HDI TRENDS BASED ON CONSISTENT TIME SERIES DATA AND NEW GOALPOSTS (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT, 2019).....	55
TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEES BY AREA OF EXPERTISE AND ORGANISATION	56
TABLE 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND EXAMPLE QUESTIONS	56

I. ABSTRACT

Niger has the highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world, with 76% of girls married by 18, and 28% of girls married by 15. Although Niger's government has made stated, policy, and legal commitments to eliminate the practice, and non-profit organisations are researching and conducting work to fight against child marriage in Niger, there continues to be a lack of significant improvement on this issue. By comparison, Ethiopia has seen a substantial reduction in its child marriage prevalence rate in recent decades due to the success of various intervention programs – notably, the Berhane Hewan program in the rural Amhara region. Indeed, UNICEF reported in 2018 that the percentage of girls married by 18 in Ethiopia dropped substantially, from 47% to 25%, over the last decade (Clark, 2019). In the search for an impactful, sustainable, and cost-effective intervention program that could be implemented in Niger, we can look to Berhane Hewan as a potential example.

This study uses open-ended qualitative interviews, both over the phone and over email, of nine research and program experts on child marriage to ascertain the extent to which Berhane Hewan might feasibly be replicated with success in Niger. While recognising that intervention programs must be tailored to the particular nature of child marriage in different local contexts, this paper finds that the various programmatic arms employed by the Berhane Hewan program are likely to be strategically successful in reducing, or delaying, child marriage in Niger. This is because, among other contextual similarities to Ethiopia, child marriage in Niger is driven strongly by a lack of access to education, as well as by traditional gender norms and patriarchal values. For example, to the latter point, married women possess little household decision-making power in both countries, and unmarried girls are likely to have even less self-agency: in Niger, only 3.5% of married women are the principal decisionmaker of their own health, and in Ethiopia during the Berhane Hewan program, this measure stood at only 14.6% (Niger DHS, 2012 & Ethiopia DHS, 2005). Despite these similarities, however, Niger experiences funding and military conflict challenges that are likely to mean that, in the short-term, only certain arms of the program will be cost-effective, and certain areas may not be able to sustain the program. In addition, the current legislative landscape may prove a barrier to sustainable, long-term change.

Accordingly, key recommendations are delineated into short-, medium-, and long-term goals. In the short-term: (1) work with local community leaders and government officials to tailor the design and implementation of the various version(s) of the Berhane Hewan program; and (2) show proof of concept, by implementing two condensed studies of the Berhane Hewan program at small-scale. In the medium-term: (3) improve access to education in rural areas of Niger. In the long-term: (4) include additional arms of the program and scale the program to the national level; and (5) mobilise legal partners, local community leaders, and government officials to

help assess the obstacles impeding attempts to increase the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

Over 650 million women and 150 million men who are alive today were married as children (Girls Not Brides, 2020). They are victims of child marriage, a practice defined as any formal marriage or informal union where one or both of the parties involved are under 18 years of age. Child marriage is a global problem which disproportionately affects girls; as such, this paper focuses on child marriage as it affects girls rather than boys. The practice can also be found in every region in the world, transcending countries, continents, cultures, religions, and ethnicities. In some areas of the world, the national child marriage rate for girls exceeds 70%. Niger is the country with the highest child marriage rate in the world: 76% of girls are married by the age of 18, and 28% of girls are married even earlier, by 15 (*State of the World's Children*, 2019). In some regions of the country, girls are deprived of their childhood and married at as young as 10 years old, and most husbands of child brides are at least 10 years older than they are (Selby & Singer, 2019).

The urgency in working to end child marriage comes with examining not just how widespread the practice is, but also how deep its consequences are. The practice has extensive negative implications not only on the large population of girls who are married, but also on their families, communities, and national economies. A 2017 World Bank study found that eliminating child marriage would reduce stunting and child mortality, and improve girls' education by delaying pregnancy and allowing girls to stay in school (Wodon & Petroni, 2017). These negative effects on girls' health and education, among other consequences, are estimated to cost countries tens of billions in U.S. dollars each year. This is because girls are married before they may be physically and emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. As child brides, they may also be disempowered in ways that deprive them of or violate their basic human rights. Furthermore, these dynamics affect not only the girls themselves, but also their children, households, and communities, limiting the country's ability to reach its full socioeconomic potential.

Although the rates of child marriage globally are slowly declining, this progress is not happening fast enough. Each year, about 12 million girls are married before their 18th birthday – nearly 1 girl every 3 seconds – and if current trends continue, 150 million more girls will be married as children by 2030 (Girls Not Brides, 2020). In Niger in particular, efforts to reduce, or delay, child marriage appear to be having little widespread effect: the proportions of women and girls of different generations who were married as children continue to be strikingly similar. For example, 76.3% of women aged 20-24 were married by 18, and 28.0% of them by 15, while 77.1% of women aged 35-39 were

married by 18, and 28.6% of them by 15 (Niger DHS, 2012). *Table 1* in the Appendix contains additional data, taken from the 2012 Niger Demographic and Health Survey, on the percentage of women aged between 15-49 who were married by particular ages, as well as the median age of first marriage among women in different age groups, indicating trends on a generational level. It is thus imperative for us to examine the efficacy of the existing solutions landscape – in Niger and elsewhere – in order to determine which intervention programs may have the feasibility to accelerate a reduction, or a delay, in child marriage in Niger.

The current solutions landscape¹ in Niger is currently largely being driven by non-profit organisations, although there has been some government traction to ban the practice by increasing the minimum age at first marriage for girls to 18, in line with the age for boys. That said, the degree to which the government is prioritizing this pledge is questionable, as it has been two years since its commitment to ban child marriage and there have still been no tangible legal changes (Plan International, 2017). Many widely respected non-profits do nonetheless have a large presence in attempting to solve the issue of child marriage in Niger. There is the sense, however, that attempts to reduce, or to delay, child marriage in Niger are having only minimal impact, given that the child marriage rate both regionally and nationally has remained persistently high, with little meaningful reduction seen. This trend calls for further investigation into the particular intervention strategies and programs that are being tried in other countries afflicted by child marriage, and which ones have been successful in effecting positive change.

Subsequently, we turn to Ethiopia's 'Berhane Hewan' (meaning 'Light for Eve' in Amharic) intervention program to delay child marriage as an example. Piloted in 2004 in Ethiopia's Amhara region, girls aged 10-14 who participated in the Berhane Hewan program experienced significant improvement in school enrolment over the intervention period and were less likely to be married compared with the control group, among other positive outcomes (Erulkar, 2009). The program has since been replicated in studies conducted in Burkina Faso and Tanzania, with results showing differing levels of success between the two regions, thereby indicating the importance of considering the local context when designing and implementing programs. That being said, the evaluation report of the pilot program in Amhara directly cited Niger's context – as one with a higher percentage of marriages before 15 and poor educational attainment levels – specifically as an example where the Berhane Hewan program would have tremendous potential for success (Erulkar, 2009). An evaluation into the feasibility of replicating the Berhane Hewan program in Niger is thus an incredibly interesting and pertinent task in the search for an effective intervention program in the country most afflicted by child marriage in the world.

¹ 'The current solutions landscape' here refers to the various methods that currently exist as potential solutions to reduce, or to eliminate, child marriage in Niger. These solutions include, but are not limited to, anti-child marriage advocacy efforts, research studies, and intervention programs.

In this paper, I conduct a comparative analysis of Ethiopia's Amhara region and Niger, and their respective relationships with child marriage, to determine whether or not the Berhane Hewan program could feasibly be replicated with success in Niger. This study uses phone and email interviews, of nine experts on child marriage (globally, as well as specifically in Niger and Ethiopia), and combines this data with document review and secondary data collection to build a picture of the similarities and differences between the two contexts in question. Subsequently, this work makes a judgement on the relevance and strength of these similarities and differences, with respect to ascertaining if Berhane Hewan (in its entirety, or in part only) would be an appropriate intervention program to reduce, or to delay, child marriage in Niger.

2. Hypothesis and Research Question

I hypothesise that the strategies employed in Berhane Hewan program all have the potential to reduce, or at least to delay, child marriage in Niger but that at present there may be obstacles to implementing the program from an economic, personnel, or geopolitical standpoint. In order to assess the feasibility of this program if replicated in Niger, I seek to conduct a comparative analysis of the context in which child marriage occurs in the Amhara region of Ethiopia versus in regions of Niger. With this analysis in mind, I then evaluate whether or not the various arms of the Berhane Hewan intervention program – piloted in Amhara in 2004-2006 and implemented more recently in Tanzania and Burkina Faso – have the potential to be replicated with success in Niger. For the purposes of this paper, we will define “success” of the program as the ability for it to reduce the prevalence of child marriage – or at the very least to facilitate an increase in the average age at first marriage – among girls, if implemented in Niger.

My research thus proposes to address the question of: how feasibly could Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan program to delay child marriage be replicated with success in Niger?

3. Background

This section provides a brief overview of relevant components of Niger's background, including the country's demographics and its relationship with child marriage, as well as of relevant previous efforts to implement intervention programs in Niger. There is also a brief overview of the Berhane Hewan intervention program, which was piloted in Ethiopia's rural Amhara region and, more recently, was replicated in studies located in Burkina Faso and Tanzania. This background allows for integration of interviews and document review data analysis in a wider context.

(i) *Niger's Demographics*

a. Population

The current population of Niger, based on projections of the latest UN data, is about 24.5 million, at the time of writing. The country's 3.84% population growth rate

(ranked first in the world), however, projects that its population will surpass 50 million by 2041, and 100 million by 2068. This fast growth in the population can be attributed to Niger's high fertility rate, which sits at 6.95 births per woman, resulting in a very young population (median age: 15.12 years old). Although Niger is the largest country in West Africa, over 80% of its land is covered by the Sahara Desert, which is fairly uninhabitable. This has led to a low population density of just 12 people/km² and a reality where 94% of the country's population lives on just 35% of the land, causing pressure on the land. Researchers anticipate that this pressure will only increase as the effects of climate change are likely to lead to further desertification of Niger's land (World Population Review, 2020).

It is estimated that between 80-98% of Niger's overall population is Muslim, the majority of whom are Sufi and Sunni, and only 5% of whom are Shi'a Muslims (World Population Review, 2020). More than 50% of Niger's population is ethnically Hausa, and the rest of the population are nomadic or semi-nomadic. The next largest ethnicity groups after the Hausa are the Zarma/Songhai (21.2% of the total population), Tuareg (11%), Fulani/Peuhl (6.5%), and the Kanuri (5.9%) (CIA, 2020).

b. Economic Development

Niger is a developing country with an economy that is not well diversified. The economy is primarily dependent on agriculture, which accounts for 40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). More than 9.5 million people in the country are affected by poverty, the rate of which stands very high, at 41.4% (*The World Bank in Niger*, 2020). In recent years, Niger's government has made attempts to diversify and improve the economy via increased infrastructural investment, which has led to a lot of debt (World Population Review, 2020). While Niger has been the recipient of debt relief packages on a number of occasions in the past (most recently in 2015), there does not appear, at the time of writing, to be ongoing public discussion regarding the potential of providing debt relief to the country in the near future.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were mixed signs with respect to trends in Niger's economic development. On the positive side, in 2019, Niger saw robust economic growth of 6.3% following strong performance by its primary and tertiary sectors (*The World Bank in Niger*, 2020). This growth was the result of the aforementioned increase in infrastructural investment, which has been developing the private sector and strengthening the resilience of agriculture (AFDB, 2020). Also promising is that Niger's fiscal deficit fell from 4.1% to 3.9% of GDP. However, Niger also saw lower domestic revenue. Going forward, in the medium-term, there are several factors that may undermine Niger's economic development. These factors include strain from the COVID-19 pandemic (due to increased spending, and adverse impact on international trade and foreign direct investment), deteriorated security conditions, and vulnerability to climate shocks on its commodity-based economy (*The World Bank in Niger*, 2020).

c. Human Development

From a human development and inequality perspective, Niger is doing poorly on the global stage. In most recent calculations, Niger's value on the Human Development Index (HDI), sits at 0.377, positioning the country at a ranking of 189 out of 189 (in last place). The HDI is a measure for assessing long-term progress in three dimensions of human development: life expectancy, access to knowledge, and standard of living. Over time, Niger's HDI value has substantially increased since the measure was first developed in 1990 (by 76.8% when compared to the most recent calculation from 2018). This increase is displayed by *Table 2* in the Appendix, taken from the 2019 Human Development Report, which shows Niger's HDI trends based on consistent time series data and new goalposts, from 1990 to 2018. Despite this increase in its HDI level, the fact that Niger's level of human development has been determined as the worst in the world is an important consideration in which we must navigate long-term potential policy solutions to this inequality (Human Development Report Niger, 2019). This is because this poor a level of human development and a level of inequality to this scale may be indicative of (1) economic underdevelopment and other deeply structural problems that require highly engaged (and likely expensive) solutions, and (2) a lack of resources with which to develop and to implement such solutions. It is thus possible that short-term policy options, particularly at the national level, will face constraints while large-scale developmental change may only be realistic in the medium- or long-term.

(ii) Conflict and Stability in Niger

In November 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo voiced concern that the global fight against the Islamic State may be focusing itself in the Sahel region of the African continent (a region which includes areas of Niger), a worry seemingly shared by the UN. There have been a number of instances of conflict which have prompted this concern. For instance, in 2017, Islamist fighters ambushed and killed four U.S. soldiers, four Nigerien troops, and an interpreter in a tragedy outside the village of Tongo Tongo, marking the start of the coming volatility in West Africa. At the time of writing, Niger is surrounded by a region in turmoil. Mali, located to Niger's west, is seeing increasingly violent ethnic tensions and more frequent attacks of Islamic terrorism, while over 500,000 people have been forcibly displaced by Islamic terrorist groups in Burkina Faso (Spangler, 2019). Meanwhile, Nigeria, located south of Niger, continues to suffer from terrorism at the hands of Boko Haram, which has created a refugee crisis; so far, about 2 million Nigerians have been internally displaced, and hundreds of thousands more have migrated northwards to Niger and Chad, and eastwards to Cameroon (UN Refugee Agency, 2019). A relatively fragile state, regions of Niger have the potential to face a conflict crisis at the hands of any of these sources of instability.

(iii) *Prevalence of Child Marriage in Niger*

As previously noted, Niger has the highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world, with 76% of girls married by the age of 18, and 28% of girls married even earlier, by 15 (*State of the World's Children*, 2019). In some regions, girls are married at as young as 10 years old, and most husbands of child brides are at least 10 years older than them (Selby & Singer, 2019). Child marriage is endemic in Niger's society, with certain regions – Maradi (89% prevalence), Zinder (87%), and Diffa (82%) – affected more greatly than others (Save the Children, *Child Marriage in Niger*, n.d.). Also important to note is the durability of this problem, evidenced by the fact that the proportions of women and girls of different generations who were married as children, by 15 and by 18 years of age, continue to be strikingly similar. *Table 1* in the Appendix contains statistics displaying the generational similarities in both the percentages of women of different age groups within the 15-49 age range who were married by certain ages (including by 15 and by 18, i.e. as children), as well as in these age groups' median ages at first marriage.

(iv) *Effects of Child Marriage in Niger*

Child marriage is estimated to cost Niger tens of billions in U.S. dollars each year. This is because girls are married before they may be physically and emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. As child brides, they may also be disempowered in ways that deprive them of basic human rights. Furthermore, these dynamics affect not only the girls themselves, but also their children, households, and communities, limiting the country's ability to reach its full socioeconomic potential.

The practice's main implications, which perpetuate the cycle of poverty that affects half the population, include, though are not limited to:

a. Health

It is estimated that 36% of Niger's girls aged 15-19 have already given birth or are pregnant, and that 18% of girls aged 20-24 gave birth to their first child by age 15. These early pregnancies occur because child brides are expected to 'prove their worth' to their husbands through their fertility. Giving birth so young, however, puts these girls at greater risk of maternal mortality, which in 2012 constituted 35% of all deaths between ages 15-19. Furthermore, the infant mortality rate of children born to adolescent mothers is higher than those born to older mothers, mainly because of stunting due to malnutrition (Save the Children, *Child Marriage in Niger*, n.d.). Early marriage is also correlated with higher rates of psychological and domestic violence, which often leads to mental health problems or even death (Ennaji, 2019).

b. Education

Lack of access to quality education for girls is both a cause and consequence of child marriage in Niger. Once a girl is married, she is confined to gender expectations – being a wife and mother – and cannot continue education. There are thus extremely low

secondary school enrolment and completion rates: in 2015, the gross enrolment rate in lower secondary school was 34.2%, of which only 28.8% were girls, and the completion rate for girls was just 15.9% (Save the Children, *Child Marriage in Niger*, n.d.).

c. National Economy and Demographics

Education, particularly for girls, is strongly correlated with national economic performance. Since education is cut short for girls, due to child marriage, Niger's development suffers because of high rates of fertility and acute malnutrition, as well as low rates of productivity. Child marriage is associated with driving an unsustainable population growth rate: between 10-14% of Niger's fertility level is attributable to adolescents aged 15-19 (Save the Children, *Child Marriage in Niger*, n.d.). Indeed, Niger's population would have fallen by around 5% by 2030 if child marriage had ended in 2014, which would have positively affected national welfare (Batha, 2017).

One example of the negative impact child marriage has had on societal welfare is on food security. Research indicates marrying early is strongly associated with lower household food security. This is due to women's reduced agency from limited bargaining and decision-making power, as well as their reduced educational attainment, leading to a gender gap in agricultural productivity and thus food availability. Currently, nearly 20% of Niger's population experiences food scarcity; eliminating child marriage would play a critical role in improving this situation (Steinhaus & Kes, 2018).

(v) Family Law in Niger and Government Commitments to Eliminate Child Marriage (Stated, Policy, and Legal)

When it comes to family law, Niger observes and has legitimised several different sources: The Civil Code, customs, and international legal instruments. At present, the Civil Code sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for boys, and just 15 years for girls; however, most unions take place under customary or Islamic (Shari'a) law (Save the Children, *Child Marriage in Niger*, n.d.). Shari'a law dictates that the minimum age of marriage should be determined not by age but by when a child reaches puberty, thereby presenting a conflict with efforts that exist to increase the legal minimum age of marriage under the Civil Code for girls to 18 years – in line with that for boys – without exception. Since Shari'a law does not have a strict minimum age restriction to marriage, most parents who elect to marry their daughters off as children do so under religious law.

Although the legislative environment in Niger surrounding child marriage does not meet the minimum age standard for girls advocated for by various international health-, education- and development-oriented bodies, and instead is filled with loopholes and conflicting laws, the government has made a number of commitments to eliminate child marriage. On the international level, Niger's government has made a policy commitment to target 5.3 of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which aims to eliminate child, early, and forced marriage by 2030 (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Although the country is unlikely to achieve this goal, being now just 10 years away from

the deadline, this policy commitment towards promoting positive social change on this issue is certainly reassuring – and necessary. Niger in 1990 also made international legal commitments to end child marriage by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets a minimum age of marriage of 18, and later also acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1999, which obligates states to ensure free and full consent to marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2020).

Since making these international policy and legal commitments, Niger has undergone two cycles of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the Human Rights Council of the UN – the first in 2011, and the second in 2016. The second cycle revealed that several countries across different continents were still concerned at the persistently high rate of early child, and forced marriages that continues to exist in Niger, especially as the country has made legal commitments to ending the practice going back two decades. That being said, several countries acknowledged that Niger had displayed effort to cooperate with the United Nations human rights system, “particularly the standing invitation issued to special procedures,” according to Germany (UN Human Rights Council, 2016). Many countries made recommendations to Niger’s government following the UPR that specifically related to tackling child marriage. These recommendations were aligned with Niger’s existing policy and legal commitments, and included, but were not limited to: increasing the minimum legal age of marriage for girls; promoting awareness-raising campaigns and adaptive policies aimed at eliminating child marriage; and developing and implementing a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to protect girls from child marriage (UN Human Rights Council, 2016). Countries who expressed concern regarding child marriage in Niger and/or made recommendations aimed at eliminating the practice were (in alphabetical order): Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Botswana, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay (UN Human Rights Council, 2016).

Following the concerns raised by these countries in the 2016 UPR, Niger supported recommendations to adopt a Family Law to protect girls from child marriage, to increase the minimum legal age for marriage to 18, and to implement a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the practice (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Additionally, Niger’s President Issoufou Mahamadou declared in 2017 that he would no longer tolerate child marriage in the country, although this stated commitment has yet to be formalised in law (UN Women, 2019).

But despite all of these policy and legal commitments to fight against child marriage, there are questions surrounding the ability of the Nigerien government to eliminate the practice. This is because the child marriage prevalence rate remains extraordinarily high, the legal minimum age of marriage for girls under the Civil Code continues to be 15, and the observance of customary and religious laws essentially affords the majority of girls in Niger with little to no legal protection from early marriage.

(vi) *Previous Intervention Efforts in Niger*

As previously mentioned, the current solutions landscape in Niger is largely being driven by non-profit organisations. There are a number of organisations and researchers who are conducting work on child marriage in Niger, and the list below names just a couple of the more prominent, or innovative, strategies that have been recently attempted.

UNICEF is tackling child marriage on multiple fronts (with the government, plus of its own accord and with partners): working in legal development, as well as with communities to address social norms. A UNFPA-UNICEF alliance is working to end child marriage across Africa through changing laws and attitudes, and empowering women. The effect in Niger in 2018 was the participation of 62,000 adolescent girls in life-skills training, resulting in the cancellation/postponement of 853 child marriages, the return of 189 girls to school, and the referral of 11,160 girls to health centres (*UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*, 2020).

UNICEF has also partnered with religious and traditional leaders – respected community figures – in Niger to drive change aimed at ending child marriage and, since 2007, has sponsored a program that helps out-of-school adolescents get an education by combining academics and athletics. So far, the program appears to have good rates of school retention, but the solution has not been scaled up enough to have widespread positive impact on improving school enrolment and reducing child marriage rates, likely due to funding challenges (Ferguson, 2019).

Another non-profit that has recently pursued an innovative solution to tackling child marriage is World Vision Niger, which launched an educative child protection caravan in February 2019. The caravan aimed to raise awareness in the Maradi and Zinder regions – the areas with the highest child marriage rates – about child marriage and girls' education, by educating the local population on the negative effects of violence against children in general and of early marriage in particular. The program only lasted 2 weeks, however, and only reached 6 local villages. While it is too early to tell how successful this program will be, the short duration and limited location scope may mean that any positive results could be limited, with costing for the program at a larger scale uncertain (World Vision Niger, 2019).

There are also a number of collaborative alliances that exist between non-profits, and/or across countries (which include Niger). One such example is the More than Brides Alliance, which includes the organisations Save the Children, Oxfam, Novib, the Population Council, and Simavi, and aims to provide alternatives to child marriage in India, Malawi, Mali, and Niger (*Testing Effective Approaches to End Child Marriage*, n.d.). The program aims to do this by enhancing access to education, economic opportunities, and child protection services. The mid-line evaluation report revealed positive findings; however, the study acknowledged that there were program design and implementation issues, including difficulty in Niger in finding appropriate matched

comparison villages, thereby limiting the program's ability to assess impact (*More than Brides Alliance*, 2019).

(vii) Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan Program

Berhane Hewan, meaning 'Light for Eve' in Amharic, was a two-year pilot program conducted in 2004-2006, which aimed to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia's rural Amhara region. The project was conducted in the Mosebo village with the support of the Ethiopia Ministry of Youth and Sport, and the Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sport, and targeted unmarried girls aged 10-19. The Berhane Hewan program included these main components, or arms: (1) group formation by adult female mentors; (2) support for girls to remain in school (including an economic incentive); (3) participation in non-formal education (e.g. basic literacy and numeracy) and livelihood skills training for out-of-school girls; and (4) "community conversations," to engage the community in discuss of key issues (e.g. early marriage), and in collective problem solving (Erulkar, 2009).

An evaluation of the intervention revealed several key associated successes. This included a substantial improvement in girls' school enrolment, a delay in the age at first marriage, and a considerable improvement in reproductive health knowledge and contraceptive use. Particularly, girls in the 10-14 age range who were exposed to the Berhane Hewan program were less likely to have ever been married than their peers in the control group. However, among girls aged 15-19, those in the intervention area were more likely to have gotten married by the endline, versus their peers in the control group (Erulkar, 2009). As such, the main success of the program was a delay, rather than a reduction, in child marriage; this result is still regarded as a success, since delaying the age at first marriage reduces many of the risks posed to young girls by marriage.

Since the pilot program, versions of the Berhane Hewan program have been tested and studied in other countries – namely, rural areas of Burkina Faso and Tanzania. A recent quasi-experiment and costing study in these two countries revealed varying degrees of success between the different programmatic arms of Berhane Hewan, as well as between regions where the program was tested. The study demonstrated the need to pay attention to the cost, quality, and coverage of interventions in their design and implementation (Erulkar, 2020).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis seeks to construct the context in which child marriage occurs in Niger, versus in Ethiopia, in order to determine the likelihood that Ethiopia's successful Berhane Hewan intervention program to delay child marriage could be replicated with success in Niger. The literature on child marriage determines that, globally and within these two respective countries, there are a number of factors that contribute to, and sustain, the

existence of the practice; however, these works generally fail to conduct a holistic comparative analysis of regions afflicted by child marriage when designing, implementing, and replicating various intervention strategies. Too often, the literature discusses child marriage as an umbrella practice, thereby tackling child marriage as a singular – albeit complex – issue to solve. In reality, the nuances that exist within specific localities can mean that child marriage operates as a different issue, region by region, that each requires a different solution. Therefore, of particular pertinence when designing and implementing intervention strategies, is to determine how the local context informs the drivers of child marriage that exist in that specific area; strategies that aim to combat these drivers are generally the most effective in reducing the motivating strength of these drivers, and thus in reducing, or in delaying, child marriage as a practice.

This analysis compares the nuances that exist within and between Ethiopia’s Amhara region and Niger, in order to determine their significance with respect to the nature of child marriage as it occurs in each context. The paper thus aims to explore whether the strategies employed by the Berhane Hewan program are likely to successfully reduce, or delay, child marriage in Niger, as well as to assess the feasibility for short- and long-term implementation of these strategies. The analysis leans particularly heavily on exploring the local drivers of child marriage – and the strength of these drivers – in Amhara and Niger, as this framework is especially important in determining the nature of child marriage as an issue in each context. In particular, I assess this context through the lens of various practical and conceptual drivers of child marriage, established by the literature, and many of which are interconnected: lack of access to education, traditional gender norms and patriarchal values, other cultural norms, and household poverty.

1. Lack of Access to Education

Research has consistently shown that formal education is highly correlated with delayed marriage (Petroni, 2017). Studies have found that each year of secondary education may reduce the likelihood of a girl marrying as a child by 5 percentage points or more in many countries (*Educating Girls, Ending Child Marriage*, 2017). This trend appears to be true across the board. To give but one example, in Mozambique, about 60% of girls with no education are married as children, compared to 10% of girls with secondary education and less than 1% of girls with higher education (*Child Marriage and Education*, 2006).

Not only does formal education allow girls and other relevant stakeholders (such as girls’ parents and community leaders) to understand the short- and long-term detriments of child marriage to the girl child and the economy, such education also allows girls to receive the training they need to be able to pursue employment and to not have to economically depend on a husband (Pankhurst, 2014). That being said, access to formal schooling – particularly secondary schools – remains a challenge in places that are particularly afflicted by child marriage, places that include developing countries, but

especially their rural areas. In Niger, only 31% of girls and 42% of boys are enrolled in secondary school; while the statistic for boys is slightly higher, it is still very low, indicating a structural problem with schooling that goes beyond gender norms (*Children in Niger*, 2020). With poor access to formal schooling, or the existence of poor quality schooling, parents may not be able to send their daughters to school, or may choose to withdraw them from education, especially if the family is from a poorer household demographic, which is often the case for rural families (Graves et al, 2017). Without this education, there are often few perceived (or actual) opportunities for girls in the community. As a result, early marriage is either seen as a girl's only option, or the continuous lack of educated girls perpetuates the expectation that girls' place is in the household. As such, if families have both sons and daughters, they are highly likely to prioritise their sons' education, in part because of limited job opportunities available for girls (*Educating Girls, Ending Child Marriage*, 2017).

2. Traditional Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values

Estimates suggest that, globally, about 18% of those who marry as children are boys, and about 82% are girls (Zerzan, 2015). The same trend is true of Niger, where, in 2012, about 76% of women aged 20-24 were married by 18, compared with only about 5% of boys in the same age group (Niger DHS, 2012). Although child marriage is a violation of a child's rights regardless of the child's sex, these statistics show that the large majority of child marriages occur with child brides as opposed to child grooms. It is thus evident that traditional gender norms and patriarchal values play a key role in driving the practice of child marriage around the world. This is certainly suggested in all of the existing literature on this topic, which argues that these patriarchal values perpetuate the practice in explicit and/or implicit ways.

Implicitly, these values become evident when religious practices that appear to condone certain conduct (to the detriment of girls) supersede the recognition that girls' rights are being violated in the name of religious expression or observance (Miller, 2015). Miller suggests here that when a community has determined that the importance of protecting religious traditions and beliefs trumps the need to respect the statutory marriage age and the importance of protecting children, who are disproportionately girls, from entering into marriage with adults, the entrenched patriarchal values become apparent (2015). One could argue that this pattern may exist in Nigeria, where 11 states in the country's majority Muslim northern region are yet to domesticate the Child Rights Act (which criminalises child marriage) and have adopted a penal code based mainly on Shari'a law. In their objection to adopting the Child Rights Act, these states cite the law's conflict with the Islamic perspective on the minimum age of marriage, which is determined in Islam not by age but by when a child reaches puberty (Braumah, 2014).

These patriarchal values and the existence of sexist gender norms and disparities may also present in an extremely explicit fashion. Chowdhury points out her findings in Bangladesh, where women living in all areas of society "live in a social system that

condones their being accorded an inferior status” (2004). All of the literature on child marriage has argued that, in many communities, whether in Bangladesh or elsewhere (such as Niger), the practice is used as a method of controlling girls and women. The reasons for why child marriage has come to be used for this purpose are multi-fold. Chowdhury argues that child marriage is used to deprive girls and women of developing a personality by removing their ability to receive an education that might make them self-reliant; as a result, girls fail to become aware of their rights and the community prevents protests by women against their own exploitation and oppression (2004). Chowdhury also makes more direct judgements on the drivers of child marriage in patriarchal communities such as Bangladesh (2004). Such assessments include that communities view women as being inherently weak and requiring male guardianship and protection. In addition, as Erulkar and Pankhurst reflect in their research on Ethiopia, communities see child marriage as a method of preventing pre-marital sex so as to avoid familial (especially the father’s) shame and disgrace (2009 & 2014). Pankhurst further determines a correlation between the prevalence of child marriage and that of other deeply discriminatory and abusive practices along gender lines, such as female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) (2014).

The economic dependence of women on men due to stringent gender inequality, resulting from strict traditional gender roles, also implicitly encourages child marriage. As Petroni argues, in more gender-inequitable societies, men are positioned as the family breadwinner and women as wives and mothers, thereby precluding women from formal economic work or from being independent agents in the informal sector (2017). Graves et al. describe that women in the mainly Muslim countries and states in Africa’s Sahel region (which includes Niger) are “among the least empowered in the world...many don’t have a say in their own basic life choices, such as when and whom to marry, or whether to work outside the home” (2019). Samandari et al. corroborate this notion that women’s economic dependence on men is directly linked to the proliferation of traditional gender norms, noting that “the biggest potential obstacle to an adolescent pursuing opportunities is the disapproval of the husband, [whose] consent is essential for a married adolescent girl to be able to pursue education, skills training or labour participation” (2019).

3. Other Cultural Norms

There is little existing literature that clearly delineates where gender norms and other cultural norms can be separated, as they relate in particular to the practice of child marriage. There is general consensus that these norms are difficult to distinguish from each other, certainly because they feed into one another – gender norms are often at the heart of the overall culture of a society, and other cultural norms are often informed or influenced by perspectives on gender. That being said, there is some indication in the existing literature that the practice of child marriage exists as a larger social tradition that transcends gender norms in some societies. The practice may be based, perhaps, on

beliefs demarcating marriage as a passage into adulthood (for both boys and girls alike) and/or, more frequently it seems, one that rests on religious values or tradition.

Furthermore, it is important to note that attitudes towards traditional practices such as child marriage, and the cultural norms that espouse them, are usually fairly homogenous within communities, i.e. the presence of significant dissenting beliefs are usually rare within the community (Cislaghi et al, 2019).

In one example, Masquelier denotes how, among Niger's Mawri people, marriage is seen as a critical rite of passage, indexing the transition from childhood to maturity – for both boys and girls (2005). Her interviews with stakeholders in a rural Nigerien town indicate that the Mawri believe that, in order to become and to be respected as adults, both boys and girls must marry, with no acceptable alternatives (Masquelier, 2005). Marriage is thus tied to adulthood regardless of one's gender. Given the disparate child marriage statistics that exist between boys and girls in Niger, gender norms certainly push girls to marry earlier than boys; however, the element of child marriage acting as a wider social tradition is still relevant.

In many regions afflicted by child marriage worldwide, cultural norms may also be tied to religion, as argued by a fairly significant volume of existing literature. Masquelier argues that the Mawri, who are predominantly Muslim, carry the religious idea that “only marriage can prevent both the sting of a scorpion bite and the painful consequences of pre-marital sex...aiming to save the younger generation from impending depravity and destruction” (2005). Whether or not religious dogmas hold merit may be a subjective issue to some, but to others – especially deeply religious societies – these beliefs may drive a particular way of life, including early marriage. This is particularly evidenced by regions where customary, or religious, law is observed in conjunction with civil law, often resulting in legal loopholes that allow for child marriage to take place. There are multiple other studies which contribute to this argument, that the existence of religious/cultural exceptions to countries' national or international anti-child marriage legal commitments continues to perpetuate high rates of child marriage (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011). Since religious and/or cultural beliefs and traditions often drive the practice, allowing these traditions to continue means many girls continue to marry before the national statutory marriage age, whether this be 18 years old for girls or younger (Miller, 2015). That being said, it is important to note that the extent to which religious beliefs and traditions drive a tolerance towards, and a high prevalence rate of, child marriage does vary between regions and communities globally.

4. Household Poverty

Finally, much of the literature on child marriage suggests child marriage is a practice that is driven by household poverty and a family's need to survive. This is a driver that undoubtedly builds upon existing patriarchal values, as the ‘selling’ of a family's child into marriage (either for an economic reward via a dowry/bride price or in order to remove the economic cost associated with raising and feeding the child into

adulthood) occurs predominantly to girls and not to boys, as is reflected by statistics relating to the number of child brides versus child grooms (Erulkar, 2009). In some contexts, the literature stipulates this pattern occurs because girls are considered a financial burden to the parental household, whereas boys are considered a future economic asset, due to the gendering of economic opportunities (Chowdhury, 2004). It thus follows that patriarchal values towards girls, beginning immediately after birth, are ever more prominent in families that are poor and are struggling to meet basic needs.

Studies have found data that supports the argument that, in countries where poverty has decreased (e.g. Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), the rate of child marriage has also fallen (Nour, 2009). Many researchers in the field argue that this is directly related to the reduced financial incentive to families that is associated with marrying off their daughters early, including the possibility for a bride price. There is some evidence that counteracts the idea that bride wealth is a relevant incentive for child marriage; Petroni argues that, in Senegal, the inflation of bride wealth, combined with economic insecurity, has actually led to fewer child marriages as it has contributed to men's inability to afford marriage (2017).

That being said, there is a clear correlative relationship between household wealth and a girls' statistical likelihood of being married as a child. Globally, girls from poorer households are approximately twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls from wealthier households (*Child Marriage and Poverty*, 2005). It is also no coincidence that child marriage is an issue that predominantly afflicts developing countries, where a large proportion of the population lives below or around the poverty line. For example, more than 50% of girls in Bangladesh, Mali, Mozambique, and Niger are married as children, and these same countries see more than 75% of their population living on less than \$2 a day (*Child Marriage and Poverty*, 2005). If we look at figures comparing GDP per capita with child marriage rates, research shows that Chad – a country with a GDP/capita of \$1,600 per year – has a child marriage rate for girls of 71%, whereas South Africa – which has a GDP/capita of \$11,100 per year – sees only 8% of its girls being married as children (*Child Marriage and Poverty*, 2005). Much of these trends can be explained not only by poorer households having the strong incentive for direct economic gain when they marry off their daughters, but also by the fact that families who are struggling economically often cannot afford to provide their daughters with opportunities other than marriage, such as the education they would need to find a job.

IV. METHODS

1. Research Design

This study used qualitative interviews of researchers and advocates on the issue of child marriage to understand and draw comparative analysis from expert perspectives on the contexts in which child marriage occurs as a practice in Ethiopia versus in Niger.

Document review (of Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan pilot program and recent replication efforts in Burkina Faso and Tanzania) and additional, quantitative secondary data were used to supplement the insight gained from interviews.

2. Primary Data Collection

I conducted nine interviews between May 21 and September 17, 2020 with experts knowledgeable on the subject of child marriage in Ethiopia and/or Niger to gain a more complete and detailed sense of the drivers behind the practice in both contexts. All interviews were conducted remotely over the phone. Interviews were scheduled to last between thirty to forty-five minutes and ended up ranging from thirty-one to forty-nine minutes. Several interviewees also answered follow-up questions in written form via email. *Table 3* in the Appendix lists all the interviewees and describes their distribution by organisation and region of expertise.

Each interview provided critical cross-sectional primary data, largely qualitative in nature, relevant to establishing the environment under which child marriage occurs in Ethiopia and/or Niger, and the specific obstacles to preventing the practice that remain in either or both contexts. The data collected from these interviews also provided targeted expert opinion, specific to whether or not the Berhane Hewan program could hypothetically work in the Niger context. These interviews gave necessary colour to the secondary data that was also collected for this research paper, by allowing for an assessment on the particular types of interventions/solutions that must be carried out in Niger in order for positive results (i.e. a reduction in the prevalence rate of child marriage and/or an increase in the average age of first marriage) to be seen. Though the sample size of interviewees was relatively small, so is the community of people working on child marriage research, policy, and intervention programs in Ethiopia and Niger specifically. Furthermore, since the scope of my research question as it pertains to Ethiopia is largely confined to the Berhane Hewan program, interviewing just two experts for Ethiopia was deemed sufficient since one of the interviewees (Annabel Erulkar) was the principle investigator for the Berhane Hewan pilot and replication programs in Ethiopia, and in Burkina Faso and Tanzania, respectively.

Interviewee recruitment strategies for experts on child marriage included a combination of cold emailing, and recommendations and introductions made by other interviewees. There were several experts who were cold emailed for potential interviews but who either did not respond or did not have the time available for an interview, which is why they were not included as part of the primary data collection. With the exception of one individual interviewed who provided insight on child marriage more generally as a global issue, those interviewed were contacted due to their particular expertise working with the issue in either Ethiopia or Niger. In some cases, interviewees were able to speak some to child marriage as it exists in both countries and were thus asked to make comparative judgements and analyses, where possible, between the two nations' contexts.

While the questions asked in each interview differed slightly, I structured each interview so as to ensure that each interviewee was asked to comment on the same few topics of interest. Questions thus covered these categories, and were adapted to reflect the expert's particular country or area of expertise: (1) the types of child marriage that exist; (2) the factors that drive child marriage; (3) the efficacy of existing legislation to prevent the practice; (4) the efficacy of previous and/or existing non-legal interventions to prevent child marriage; and (5) the feasibility for success if the Berhane Hewan program were implemented in Niger. *Table 4* in the Appendix lists examples of the types of questions asked by category.

Each interview was recorded with the interviewee's written and/or oral permission and transcribed using Rev.com. A condition for interview for several interviewees was that their comments and insights be deidentified when referred to or quoted throughout this report; this standard was applied to all interviews to ensure this condition was fully met.

3. Document Review and Secondary Data Collection

In order to gain a more comprehensive sense of the general wellbeing of children, as well as the wider cultural and environmental contexts in which child marriage occurs in Ethiopia and Niger, this paper also used document review and qualitative and quantitative data from reputable secondary sources. These documents and sources included: an evaluation report of the Berhane Hewan pilot program in Amhara, and one of existing replication efforts in Tanzania and Burkina Faso (conducted in 2009 and 2020, respectively); Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports for Ethiopia in 2005 (at the time of the Berhane Hewan program) and for Niger in 2012 (the most recent and reliable data that exists for the country); and the 2005 and 2019 UNICEF State of the World's Children reports.

Document review of the 2009 evaluation report of Berhane Hewan and the 2020 evaluation report of the programs implemented in Burkina Faso and Tanzania provided both cross-sectional and time-series data, showing changes between the intervention's baseline and endline on a number of indicators.

The 2009 evaluation report of the pilot Berhane Hewan program provides time-series percentage distributions of surveyed girls aged 10-19 living in project and control areas, by selected characteristics (including education and marital status, to name just a couple of measures), between 2004-2006. The report also provides comparative time-series data between baseline and endline related to the suggested impact of the pilot Berhane Hewan program, with respect to the average age at first marriage and percentages of girls who were ever married.

The 2020 evaluation report of the prevention programs implemented in Burkina Faso and Tanzania provides data by implementation of different arms of the pilot Berhane Hewan program, as well as of the program in its entirety (the "comprehensive model"). The report provides cross-sectional demographic characteristics of the girls in

the project and control groups at baseline, by country and model, and cross-sectional data at endline indicating changes in risk association for the project group (with reference to the control group) on a number of measures, including being married and/or in school at endline. When referenced together, the two cross-sectional data sets at baseline and endline can be used as time-series data. Additionally, the report shows rigorous costing data for each different arm of the pilot Berhane Hewan program (cost per girl/person served per year) in both Burkina Faso and Tanzania.

The 2005 Demographic Health Survey (DHS) report for Ethiopia and the 2012 DHS report for Niger both provide cross-sectional and nationally-representative household data for a wide range of monitoring and impact evaluation development indicators. This data set is strong in its level of reliability through its use of large sample sizes, and DHS data are regularly used and referenced by child marriage researchers and advocates against the practice; however, using the 2012 DHS report for Niger to assess the context in which child marriage occurs in the country today does have its limitations, which are discussed in Section IV Subsection 5 of this paper.

The final source of secondary data that this paper uses are the UNICEF State of the World's Children reports from 2005 and 2019 – i.e. the report possessing data from when the pilot Berhane Hewan program was implemented in Amhara, and the most recently published report, respectively. The data presented in the statistical tables of this report are derived from the UNICEF global databases and many of the relevant statistics used for this paper (those related/relevant to child marriage rates, causes, and effects) were collected through UNICEF's international household survey initiative – the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) – which was a major source of data for monitoring progress on the Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals indicators. Data for regional and global indicators recorded in this report were generated as population generated averages and accord with the relevant age and sex group for each indicator, and only reported for those indicators with a population-level data coverage of at least 50%. This report has been published annually since 1980, and each annual data set is extremely reputable and reliable since UNICEF is one of the main organisations that conducts such extensive global research on child wellbeing indicators. The combination of reputability, reliability, and the type of research that has been done in this data set makes it an important secondary data source for this paper.

4. Data Analysis

I coded interviews for major themes using colour-coded highlighting (done on Microsoft Word). Quotes were then grouped by theme, and I conducted qualitative analysis to understand overarching perspectives by experts working on child marriage research and intervention programs in the regions of interest. I selected representative quotes for inclusion in this paper. Following completion of interview coding, document review and other secondary data were used to support, explain, or refute findings from the qualitative interviews. Data analysis thus tackled my research question in a two-fold

manner, aiming to uncover: (1) the weight of any similarities and/or differences in the nature of child marriage as the practice occurs in Amhara, Ethiopia versus in various regions of Niger; and thus (2) the likelihood that the strategies used in the Berhane Hewan program could work effectively, and be implemented successfully, in Niger.

5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. An inability for me to travel while completing this paper due to the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to gather additional primary data through in-person interviews with key stakeholders in Ethiopia and Niger – i.e. girls, families, and community leaders affected by child marriage. Collecting this data would have allowed me to contextualise the practice further in these regions and would thus have provided important first-hand insight as to the feasibility of a replicated Berhane Hewan program in Niger. Thus, although the primary data was derived from experts on child marriage in these particular country contexts, many of whom have worked directly with stakeholder interests and with intervention programs, my analysis cannot wholly account for the stakeholder perspective.

Using data from the 2012 Niger Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) report in order to make judgements on the feasibility for the Berhane Hewan program to be replicated with success in Niger today carries certain limitations as well. Namely, this data is, at the time of writing, 8 years old, and thus some of the demographic data may be slightly outdated. However, a similar study using demographic secondary data for Niger would likely face the same limitations as this one, given that the 2012 report is the most recent DHS data that exists for Niger, given that the 2017 data was discarded (and not published) due to concerns surrounding the integrity of the data collected. The fact that the 2017 Niger data was discarded for these concerns, however, does serve to provide further support as to the reliability of the two DHS reports this paper does derive data from (2005 Ethiopia and 2012 Niger).

Finally, the qualitative nature of the primary, and some of the secondary, data this paper uses means that much of the data analysis is correlative in nature. Therefore, although this paper's findings intend to inform anti-child marriage advocacy and policy makers as to the feasibility of Berhane Hewan being replicated in Niger with success, they should not be taken as definitive fact. However, this shortcoming would beset many evaluations of a similar question, since one can only be certain as to the success of an intervention after the program in question has actually been implemented.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides an extended exploration into the results of this paper. A summary of these results (i.e. the key takeaways, or findings, of this paper) can be found in Section VI Subsection 1 of this paper.

1. Population Demographics

A comparison of the population demographics of the Amhara region of Ethiopia, and of the areas in Niger most afflicted by child marriage, is important to conduct when determining the feasibility of replication. This is mainly because different populations (which may carry different interests, beliefs, and/or norms) may respond to the same intervention strategies – especially those coming from “outsiders” to the community – in different ways. While one demographic may be willing to accept the introduction of an intervention strategy, another may be less eager, and may even reject such a program. Since a replication of the Berhane Hewan intervention program would, obviously, come with a cost (both financial and effort-based), it is critical to assess how similar Niger’s population demographics are to Ethiopia’s Amhara region, and to evaluate the potential significance of any existing differences.

There is some similarity between the populations of Amhara, Ethiopia and of Niger. Both populations are almost entirely homogenous in terms of religious affiliation, though with respect to different religions: rural Amhara’s population is 99% Orthodox Christian, while Niger’s population is 99% Muslim (Ethiopia child marriage expert & Niger DHS 2012). One might argue that Niger’s homogenous population makes it a ripe candidate for a replicated Berhane Hewan program, given that one Ethiopian child marriage expert reasoned that the ease of implementation and success of the pilot program in Amhara was, in part, due to the homogeneity of the population:

“the rural Amhara region’s community is very homogenous, and the people are very socially cohesive. Ethiopia is a very cohesive society generally – the rural people, they really, really stick together. And that’s even more pronounced in places where everyone’s virtually the same ethnic group. Everyone’s the same religion. There’s a lot of cohesion in those types of communities, especially around government leadership and around the church. Rural Amhara is 99% Orthodox Christian, which makes change in the environment very easy because there’s not a lot of dissenting voices. If people decide as a community that they’re convinced about an idea, they will often all decide collectively and all stick to the plan...I think the social cohesion really helped the success of the [Berhane Hewan] project.”

This argument surrounding the importance of a homogenous and socially cohesive population gets stronger when we consider that Tanzania saw less success than Amhara in its replication of the Berhane Hewan program. The same Ethiopian child marriage expert as above attributed some of this more disappointing result in Tanzania to the fact that there was a lot more variability in the way its communities work, due to its more heterogenous population. Therefore, one might posit that the homogenous population of Niger – being 99% Muslim – in itself increases the chances of success in the country for a replicated Berhane Hewan program.

However, there are two key differences between the Amhara and Niger populations that have the potential to make the successful implementation of any child marriage intervention program – not just Berhane Hewan – more challenging in Niger than in Amhara. These are that Niger is a Muslim majority country (which observes both civil and customary law) and that Niger is a francophone country.

Looking first at Niger’s status as a Muslim majority country, a couple interviewees expressed concern surrounding the feasibility of success for interventions that are inconsistent with Shari’a law, or Islamic beliefs. One Nigerien child marriage expert expressed that there has been a lot of political pushback in Niger and other Muslim majority countries with respect to increasing the age of marriage for girls to 18, and that such pushback has the potential to extend to intervention programs, as well, particularly if the approach taken is not careful to ensure that it does not denounce Shari’a law as “wrong.” Another Nigerien child marriage expert voiced additional concern that the faction of Islam that is practiced in Niger is becoming more conservative, and that this may provide an especially challenging environment for intervention programs that are inherently more gender progressive in nature and purpose:

“Niger didn’t used to be that conservative, but it’s becoming more influenced by Quranic schools, with support from, for example, Saudi Arabia. So, you see a tendency in Niger now for more conservative religion – women and girls are more covered up than they used to be, for instance. I think this could lead to even more limited rights for women and girls. That’s, at least, my impression.”

It must be emphasised that Niger being a Muslim majority country does not equate to an impossible situation with respect to implementing interventions to reduce the prevalence of child marriage. But such interventions must be sure to take additional consideration when navigating the particular religious, social, and political landscapes that exist in Niger, in order to maximise the chances of successful implementation and results.

Niger being a francophone country also appears to add a challenge to the child marriage intervention landscape. Several interviewees (of Nigerien and Ethiopian expertise) – commenting on why Niger has seen less progress with respect to reducing the child marriage rate in recent years, when compared with other countries in Africa – hypothesised that this trajectory could be attributed, in part, to the nation being French-speaking and, therefore, seeing less foreign investment. One Nigerien child marriage expert said:

“The francophone countries have had a different trajectory than many other countries, in terms of their overall general development, which I think has perpetuated a lot of the worse outcomes we see in many of those countries, including Niger... I think it’s because of the language barrier. The majority of the world and the world’s economy functions in English. From an academic perspective, a majority of scholarship, published manuscripts, and conferences happen in English. So, I think when there is less English being spoken, the

country is left out of whatever sphere it may be – whether economic, academic... all of that investment.”

The fact that Niger is French-speaking thus appears to be associated with additional challenges in attracting foreign investment. Subsequently, future research would want to evaluate the potential amount of investment that might feasibly exist and that would go towards implementing a child marriage intervention program such as Berhane Hewan – additional research could go towards determining this. However, what is important is that larger scale investments typically respond to and follow proof of concept. As a result, it is possible that – if a replicated Berhane Hewan is deemed to have potential for success in Niger on a theoretical basis – receiving substantial investment to implement the program may first require proof of concept via a small ranged study in the local context.

2. Types of Child Marriage

When discussing intervention programs to prevent, or to delay, child marriage it is important to assess the type(s) of child marriage that exists in the region in question, and thereby determine whether or not proposed programs are strategically capable of fighting against the endemic form of the practice. Interviewees consistently stressed that there are many different practices that fall under the umbrella term ‘child marriage’, by virtue of the married girl being under the age of 18. Therefore, it is important to recognise that child marriage as a practice can – and does – differ across afflicted regions when designing and implementing intervention programs.

One interviewee, who has worked on child marriage in several countries on the African continent, expressed that the biggest weakness in the field is that *“everything is called child marriage if the girl is married under the age of 18...and so a lot of the programs are actually not tailored to the different practices that exist in Africa...we don’t actually look at the different forms of child marriage and that’s part of the problem.”* Another Ethiopian child marriage expert discussed how the type of child marriage practiced varies even on the national level as you venture into different regions of the country, which each face different drivers and pressures.

If we compare the types of child marriage practiced in Ethiopia and Niger, we can see several similarities and differences. Importantly – and urgently – there is a great degree of forced, or arranged, marriage, particularly in the case of early child marriage (pre-15) in rural areas. One Nigerien child marriage expert indicated that many young girls in rural Niger become confined into a marriage arranged by their parents, which may explain why 28% of girls in Niger are married before the age of 15, and 76% of girls are married by 18, versus just 5% of boys being married by 18 (*State of the World’s Children*, 2019). Looking more closely at the Amhara region of Ethiopia, where the Berhane Hewan pilot program took place in 2004-2006, the evaluation study found that only 15% of married girls in Amhara had consented to their marriage (Erulkar, 2009). As a result, forced early marriage appears to act as the main form of child marriage in both

Niger and Amhara. One Ethiopian child marriage expert spoke further to the nature of child marriage in Amhara, expressing that:

“the Amhara have one particular type of child marriage – a building of bonds between families. They’re not strong economic exchanges, there’s almost no polygamy in Amhara. But there are also very high rates of divorce in Amhara, partly probably because you’ve not paid 10 cows for that girl. It’s been a relatively even economic exchange.”

The same Ethiopian child marriage expert also assessed some of the differences seen in the types of child marriage practiced elsewhere, including in Niger – namely suggesting that Niger has a higher prevalence of polygamy within the practice of child marriage, as well as a much higher divorce rate and the greater existence of bride wealth, or exchange of dowry. A Nigerien child marriage expert corroborated this claim, indicating that *“Niger has high levels of polygamy which appear to be something of a driver of child marriage and which reflect norms of polygamy at the community level, as well as high rates of divorce.”* Statistical data supports this argument regarding polygamy: 36% of all wives in Niger claim to be in a polygamous marriage, including about 20% of married girls aged 15-19, with the rate as high as 52% of all marriages in Niger’s Maradi region (Niger DHS, 2012). By contrast, under 3% of all marriages were polygamous in the Amhara region of Ethiopia in 2005 (Ethiopia DHS, 2005).

Evidently, there are several differences with respect to the types of child marriage practiced in Ethiopia (particularly in Amhara) and in Niger, most notably with respect to the rates of polygamous marriage and of divorce. That said, interviewees consistently expressed that there is one key similarity between the two contexts – that there is a relatively high degree of early child marriage (pre-15) in both cases. At baseline of the Berhane Hewan pilot program, the Amhara project population of girls showed 9.5% of girls aged 10-14 had ever been married, and 46.0% of girls aged 15-19 had ever been married, meaning that approximately 20.7% of all the girls (approx. 1 in 5) married as children were married by 15 (Erulkar, 2009). In Niger, 28% of all girls are married by 15, and 76% are married by 18, meaning that approximately 36.8% of all the girls (over 1 in 3) married as children were married by 15 (*State of the World’s Children*, 2019). Although these proportions are different, the argument for high rates of early marriage can be made in both cases. As a result, since the Berhane Hewan program saw most of its success in the early marriage range – with girls’ marriage arrangements seeming to be delayed to later adolescence – other differences in the types of child marriage between Amhara, Ethiopia and Niger become less important than this key similarity in early marriage trends.

3. Drivers of Child Marriage

Interviewees flagged four main drivers of child marriage for comparison in Ethiopia (particularly in Amhara) and Niger: (i) lack of access to education, (ii) gender norms and patriarchal values, (iii) other cultural norms, and (iv) household poverty.

Combined with document review and secondary data, it appears that a lack of access to education, as well as the endemism of traditional gender norms and patriarchal values, are particularly strong drivers of child marriage in both contexts. The existence and persistence of other cultural norms, however, that make child marriage a traditional (and normalized) practice appears to be more entrenched, and therefore a stronger driver of child marriage, in Niger. Meanwhile, household poverty may be a stronger driver of child marriage in the Amhara region of Ethiopia (versus in Niger), as traditional gender norms appear to outweigh economic pressures when it comes to decisions about pulling girls out of school in the Nigerien context.

(i) **Lack of Access to Education**

Interviewee insight makes it clear that lack of access to education – due particularly to a lack of infrastructure – acts as a key driver of child marriage in both Ethiopia and Niger, especially in rural areas. This is because the families of girls without an accessible (or affordable) secondary school see marriage as their only option for her.

One Ethiopian child marriage expert expressed how there is a severe lack of secondary schools available in rural areas: *“the last estimate I saw in Ethiopia was that there are 28,000 government primary schools, but only about 2,600 secondary schools, which are mostly in town.”* This primary-to-secondary gap in education – in terms of both availability and accessibility of schools – means that girls in Ethiopia who want to go to secondary school or tertiary education have to travel away from their families, which poses financial challenges in addition to presenting various fears and risks (e.g. gender-based violence) associated with their daughters being far from home. As a result, although the rate for female primary education enrolment in rural areas is steadily increasing, the same cannot yet be said for secondary education. As seen at baseline of the Berhane Hewan program in Amhara in 2004, of the 10-19 year old girls living in the project area, 43.9% had 0 years of schooling, and 38.5% had only 1-4 years of schooling (Erulkar, 2009). The other Ethiopian expert interviewed added that the areas that are focusing on building more schools (as part of improving rural development and educational infrastructure) are seeing marked declines in the child marriage rate, as girls are afforded the opportunity to pursue education as an alternative to marriage. Statistical data supports this observation: Ethiopia’s median age at first marriage increases with increasing education, from an average of 16.3 years among girls with no education to 22.4 years among women with a secondary education and to 24.0 years among women with more than a secondary education (Ethiopia DHS, 2016).

Several Nigerien child marriage experts expressed that a very similar trend in the accessibility of formal education is also apparent in Niger. One interviewee noted that:

“there are very limited opportunities for education – very low rates of formal schooling in Niger, meaning there are very few alternative options to child marriage for girls. Something like 77% of girls in the 10-14 age range and 61%

of boys in rural areas are not in school. So, schooling isn't really available as an option."

Corroborating this sentiment, another Nigerien child marriage expert commented that child marriage in the country is driven by *"a combination of poverty, inaccessibility, or just inadequacy of schools."* Therefore, it appears that the rural areas of Ethiopia (which includes Amhara) and Niger both experience a lack of accessibility to education as a driver of child marriage.

(ii) **Traditional Gender Norms and Patriarchal Values**

It is not surprising that child marriage globally is driven by gender inequality – one only has to look at the statistics available for how many girls are married before the age of 18, versus boys, in order to see that the practice disproportionately affects girls. That said, assessing the strength of traditional gender norms and patriarchal values in different regions afflicted by child marriage is important when determining appropriate intervention methods for the local context. Data analysis shows that both Ethiopia and Niger certainly have conservative gender norms – as seen in gender disparities in school enrolment and work opportunities, as well as attitudes towards gender roles – which mainly serve to perpetuate child marriage for girls by restricting the options available to them. The key takeaway, however, is that interviewees consistently voiced that these unequal gender norms and values in both Ethiopia and Niger may be malleable towards greater female empowerment – if the correct approach is taken to enact such social norms change.

One interviewee linked the endemism of conservative gender norms in both countries to a lack of development, commenting that: *"where you have a lot of arranged child marriage by the parents, usually for girls at very young ages like in Niger and Ethiopia, you have these very, very traditional conservative gender norms, in part because they have very, very dire low levels of under development. So, families don't see alternative options for girls than for them to get married early."*

Connected to this is the idea that girls and women have little self-agency in rural areas of Ethiopia and Niger, which is a reality fuelled and reflected by traditional gender norms and roles. One Nigerien child marriage expert noted that *"girls themselves are not able to necessarily express their preferences – they're not able to negotiate certain outcomes for themselves like, 'I would like to stay in school,' etc."* Another Nigerien child marriage expert corroborated that Niger is *"a very patriarchal society in some ways. Women have some decision-making powers, but really, when you look at it, women have quite a limited, and a much different, role in society than men."* These different roles are fuelled, on the one hand, by girls and women being seen as 'lesser', and, on the other hand, by *"norms that dictate men should be the decision-makers and to marry younger girls in order to give them more potency"* (Nigerien child marriage expert).

Statistical data supports this argument, showing that, even as wives (which is, in many cases, their expected life trajectory or goal), women possess little decision-making

power in the household in both countries. This stresses that, as unmarried girls, they likely have even less self-agency. In Niger, only 21% of married women are involved in decisions about their own health (with only 3.5% being the principal decisionmaker), and only 20% are involved in decisions concerning important household purchases (Niger DHS, 2012). Meanwhile, in Ethiopia in 2005, 66% of married women were involved in decisions about their own health (with 14.6% being the principal decisionmaker), and 57% were involved in making decisions on large household purchases (Ethiopia DHS, 2005). Although there is a clear gendered power dynamic with respect to decision-making ability in both countries, women in Ethiopia participate in these decisions at markedly higher rates than in Niger, suggesting conservative gender roles are even more endemic in the latter than in the former.

Interviewees consistently pointed out the disparate levels of educational attendance and attainment along gender lines in both Niger and Ethiopia, as well as an economic reliance on men to be the ‘breadwinners’ of the household, as further evidence of the existence of these different gender roles. An Ethiopian child marriage expert, speaking from the perspective of the families who marry their daughters off as children, noted:

“if there aren’t work opportunities locally for young women, what do you expect them to do? If the girls have not done well at school or they’ve dropped out, there aren’t work opportunities there. What alternatives do you offer them to marriage if you are not going to improve the work opportunities for girls?”

Similarly, a Nigerian child marriage expert highlighted that Niger has very few work opportunities for women, and that their reliance on men economically is very strong. This creates a natural tendency for families to see marriage and childbearing (traditional female gender roles) as their daughters’ futures, versus education and a potential career.

In addition to the issue of traditional gender norms, patriarchal values and a desire to control girls and women (by families and men) also drive child marriage in both Ethiopia and Niger. These values are demonstrated directly in the sphere of child marriage itself, as well as through other facets of life in both nations’ societies. Looking directly at patriarchal values within child marriage, interviewees consistently mentioned that the practice is seen as a way of “protecting” girls from pre-marital sex and pregnancy (especially since there is a severe lack of access to, and in many cases a taboo against, modern contraception), and particularly from the shame such behaviour would bring to the girls’ families. One Ethiopian child marriage expert discussed the great level of disgrace families experience when their unmarried daughters fall pregnant, leading to a strong push for young girls to be married off as soon as possible. A similar trend happens in Niger, according to several Nigerian child marriage experts, who voiced that Nigeriens see child marriage as a strict control over girls’ sexuality, and as a protection against unmarried pregnancies. This desire to control girls’ sexualities by marrying them off before they become sexually active provides a rationale for why such a large proportion

of girls in both Ethiopia and Niger are married early – pre-15, or around the age of puberty, in many cases.

There are even more insidious displays of patriarchal values that play out in both Ethiopia and Niger, and which are likewise important to discuss when assessing the influence of such values in driving child marriage. One Nigerien child marriage expert spoke to one of the more prominent measures that child marriage researchers look at in determining the strength of these patriarchal values in these societies: the level of and attitudes toward gender-based violence, such as assault and wife beating.

Looking at the level of and attitudes towards gender-based violence, it is evident that, in both Ethiopia and Niger, beating one's wife is a common phenomenon, in both rural and urban families. In the Amhara region of Ethiopia in 2005, 91.3% of women aged 15-49 agreed that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one of the following reasons: burning food, arguing with him, going out without telling him, neglecting the children, and/or refusing to have sex with him (Ethiopia DHS, 2005). By comparison, the rate across regions of Niger is lower than that in Amhara, but nonetheless reveals the high frequency of domestic violence, with the percentage of women agreeing ranging from 22.4% in the Agadez region to as high as 84.4% in the Tillaberi region (Niger DHS, 2012). It is evident that violence against women in both countries is tolerated and accepted in society at large.

(iii) Other Cultural Norms

It can be hard to distinguish gender norms from other cultural norms in Ethiopia and Niger – with respect to the influence these norms have on driving child marriage. Indeed, one interviewee commented that, in highly patriarchal societies like Niger and Ethiopia, it is important not to downplay the extent to which gender inequality can shape culture. That being said, it appears that, in both societies, other cultural norms stretching beyond gender play a direct hand in driving child marriage, or in driving certain behaviour traits that propel the rate of child marriage. As such, child marriage may act as a larger social tradition that transcends traditional gender norms and patriarchal values in certain regions of both Ethiopia and Niger.

In Ethiopia's Amhara region, marriage is seen as an achievement, and so there is an element of pride parents feel when they marry off their daughters, indicating the practice is as much a general reflection of wider social attitudes towards marriage itself, as it is a reflection of gender norms. As one Ethiopian child marriage expert said:

“for me and my daughter, when I see her graduate from college, I know that I've fulfilled my job as a parent. But in rural Amhara, it's when you see your daughter married that you feel you've fulfilled your job as a parent. Among the Amhara, that's mainly the driver of marriage.”

Similarly, in Niger, marriage is understood as a rite of passage into adulthood for girls, and thus affords a corresponding level of respect, thereby elevating the status of a married girl in society over an unmarried girl, according to a Nigerien child marriage

expert. Additionally, like in Amhara, marriage in Niger *“is a way to preserve family relationships and family structures, operating as a social institution.”*

It appears, however, that child marriage is a practice that is far more ingrained in the popular way of life in many regions in Niger than in Ethiopia. To a certain extent, it might be possible to ascribe this reality to the differences in the two areas’ religious demographics, as described in Section V Subsection 1 of this paper. Several interviewees tied the fact that Niger is 99% Muslim, and that Islamic beliefs are becoming more gender conservative in the country, to the fact that advocates have struggled to raise the statutory minimum age of marriage for girls to 18, in line with boys. As was described in Section III Subsection 2, and later in Section V Subsection 4, a confusing and complex legal framework that allows for the multiple observance of different types of law (the Civil Code, as well as customary law) means that there exist religious exceptions to minimum marriage age legislation for Shari’a law. Subsequently, one could posit that religion has had a powerful hand in fuelling early marriage in Niger, by entrenching cultural norms that make child marriage not only a tolerable practice, but one that carries a religious mandate.

That being said, interviews with Nigerien experts showed that religion is not actually the predominant force here; rather, these experts revealed different non-gendered reasons for why child marriage exists as a far more culturally entrenched practice in Niger versus Ethiopia. Although they acknowledged that religion plays a role in explaining the current child marriage situation in Niger, experts argued that religion in Niger generally acts more as a barrier to reducing child marriage due to its impact on the legal framework, rather than as a key driver that propels the practice in and of itself. This point is explained in greater depth in Section V Subsection 4. Instead, these experts made the argument that, in Niger, child marriage as a practice has displayed more of a capacity to operate as a community wide tradition, or as a seasonal event shared by the community, that transcends gender or religious norms. By contrast, child marriage operates more as an individual event in Ethiopia. To this point of collectivism being an entrenched cultural norm in Niger, one Nigerien child marriage expert noted that:

“In some ethnic groups in Niger, there is a cohort effect. There are patterns whereby marriage practices are aligned with the harvest, for example. So, you have a whole age group of girls getting married in a ‘marriage season.’ It’s tied into cultural notions that are more collective. Marriage is not seen as an individual choice, so much as a collective choice at the family and the community level.”

In addition, whereas experts in Ethiopia expressed that obedience is generally a behavioural condition expected solely of girls and women towards men and elders, the cultural value placed on obedience appears to transcend gender lines in Niger – and towards a more collective notion. The same Nigerien child marriage expert, speaking on cultural norms aside from gender that exist and drive child marriage, highlighted that Nigerien society conceptualises obedience as being a means of attaining peace and

harmony at the family and community levels. As a result, the obedience with which girls respect and follow their parents' decision for them to marry young has the potential to carry elements of an innately gender-neutral cultural phenomenon than a deeply gendered one:

“something that was interesting that came out of our qualitative research in Niger was that participants mentioned obedience throughout conversations on various topics. It wasn't just about women obeying their husbands or their parents, but also husbands being obedient towards their wives in certain conceptualisations. But really, it's a more expanded notion of obedience that has to do with conforming to a whole and being part of a collective. Really, it's tied towards peace. It's tied to other concepts of harmony at the village level, at the family level – to be obedient towards one another.”

Consequently, it appears that, while there are cultural norms – those of bonding families together and of the achievement of marriage – that play out on an individual level to drive child marriage in Ethiopia's Amhara region, there are additional elements which suggest other, non-gendered, cultural norms play out in Niger on a deeper, wider societal level. There are certainly similarities between the two regions, including that marriage is viewed as a rite of passage into adulthood; however, there is potentially a worry that cultural and social norms aside from gender play a much deeper role in driving child marriage as a collective social tradition in Niger. This could make attitudes towards and the prevalence of child marriage in Niger less susceptible to immediate change than in Ethiopia.

(iv) Household Poverty

Discussion with interviewees revealed that, while household poverty drives child marriage in both Ethiopia's Amhara region and Niger, it does so in different ways. Both Ethiopian child marriage experts argued that, in Amhara, poverty can drive child marriage by virtue of the fact that marrying off a daughter means the family has one fewer mouth to feed. One of the experts took particular care to mention that the region does not see strong economic exchanges associated with the marriage itself, noting that the economic exchange is *“relatively even...you've not paid 10 cows for the girl.”*

By contrast, in Niger, interviewees consistently said that extreme poverty drives child marriage because of the associated economic exchange – i.e. bride wealth. Additionally, one Nigerien expert said that poverty is a particularly large driver of child marriage due to its exacerbation *“by climate stress, drought, food insecurity, and overpopulation.”* This sentiment was corroborated by another Nigerien expert, who spoke to the causes and effects of these environmental stressors:

“in the context of child marriage, where young girls are starting to give birth very early, and then having rapid repeat pregnancies, the total fertility rate continues to rise – and in a climate where people are still earning their income primarily based on agriculture. But as climate change shrinks the amount of arable land,

there is a particularly large problem since, obviously, the population is still continuing to grow, but the land the people can live on, and live off of, is shrinking. So, people's economic opportunities are significantly affected."

There is thus a cyclical impact on child marriage. The practice itself – driven also by other factors, such as traditional gender norms (the push for girls to ‘prove’ their fertility, for instance) – when combined with the stressors of climate change and overpopulation, results in fewer economic opportunities for entire households. The resulting increase in household poverty fuels child marriage, as the promise of the receipt of financial assets in exchange for marrying off one’s daughter, becomes more enticing.

Although there may be slightly different motives associated with marrying a girl early among poorer households in Niger versus in Ethiopia’s Amhara region, the resulting trend expressed by interviewees is similar: girls coming from households in lower wealth quintiles typically marry at earlier ages. Statistical data supports this trend. Looking at data for Ethiopia in 2005 (when the Berhane Hewan program was implemented), among women surveyed aged 20-49, the median age at first marriage for girls in the lowest wealth quintile was 16.2, versus 18.2 for girls in the highest wealth quintile (Ethiopia DHS, 2005). Similarly, in Niger, among women surveyed aged 20-49, the median age at first marriage for girls in the lowest wealth quintile was 15.5, versus 17.5 for girls in the highest wealth quintile (Niger DHS, 2012).

That said, in certain contexts these different motives in marrying off a daughter – when related to household poverty – may be important to consider when determining the potential efficacy of particular intervention strategies in reducing the prevalence of child marriage. Additionally, the strength of household poverty as a factor influencing a decision to marry off a daughter early must be weighed against other drivers of marriage. One Nigerien child marriage expert noted that, although household poverty drives child marriage in the country just as it does in Ethiopia’s Amhara region, it is likely that limiting gender roles and expectations for girls act as a much stronger driver in Niger:

“through [our research], we have not heard that girls [in Niger] are forced to drop out of school because of school fees, but rather that gender roles and expectations for girls after puberty limit family’s investment in girls’ education.”

In Ethiopia, however, families with the financial means to educate their daughter(s) by and large keep them in school, or withdraw them for reasons other than strict gender norms, such as the lack of access to education, mentioned in Section V Subsection 3(i) – according to one Ethiopian child marriage expert. As a result, it appears that household poverty acts as a stronger driver of child marriage in Amhara, Ethiopia, than across Niger.

4. Anti-Child Marriage Legislation

The key difference when comparing the anti-child marriage legislations of Ethiopia and Niger is that marriage is illegal in Ethiopia for both boys and girls under the age of 18, while it is still legal for girls to marry at 15 years old (versus for boys at 18

years old) in Niger. Interviewees consistently expressed that having legislation stipulating a minimum age of marriage at 18 for girls is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition to ensuring the sustainable success of child marriage intervention programs. If true, this suggests that – for programs such as Berhane Hewan to have successful results long-term – Niger needs to increase the statutory minimum age of marriage for girls to 18, and close any loopholes created by the coexistence of customary and religious (Shari’a) marriage laws.

Several Nigerien child marriage experts, when interviewed, expressed that legal pluralism² has created various legal loopholes that give credence to child marriage, as customary and religious laws provide exceptions to statutory family law in Niger. Indeed, the level of credence to child marriage provided by these loopholes is such that one interviewee indicated that, even if there were a unified system of laws in the country (e.g. observance only of statutory law), the minimum age of marriage for girls would likely still be 15 years old, and there would likely still be exceptions to that rule, allowing for even earlier marriages. This sentiment might be explained by the fact that, as legal scholar Tamahana points out, customary or religious norms “enjoy at least one major advantage over state legal systems: they work in ways that people understand” simply because they are *of* the community, even if a strong case could be made that these norms are not *for* the community due to their violation of human rights and women’s rights (2011). In other words, customary or religious norms are likely to be far more revered among a community than statutory law – and so, unless these norms are adapted, they may continue to influence behaviour even when they are no longer part of a country’s legal framework.

By comparison, family law governing child marriage in Ethiopia is much clearer than in Niger – due mainly, perhaps, to the fact that Ethiopia has a unified legal system, rather than a pluralistic one. Although there are exceptions to the law (such as parental consent) and a lack of observance in many areas (particularly rural), the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys is clearly set by law at 18. A Nigerien child marriage expert commented that Ethiopia’s clear minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls may have contributed to the significant reduction in child marriage in the country – including in the Amhara region – over the last 10 years and how similar legislation might similarly affect child marriage in Niger, even if a legal framework is not, in itself, a sufficient method of change:

“laws expand the enabling environment... the law isn’t the driver of the social change, but the law is there to open up the option for social change. In Niger right now, the legal age of marriage for girls is 15, so programs can’t lean on

² As defined by legal scholar Brian Tamahana, “*legal pluralism* refers to a context in which multiple legal forms coexist” (2011). Tamahana notes that legal pluralism commonly involves “the presence of norms and institutions identified with custom, tradition, or religion, or with informal or village tribunals, operating alongside state legal institutions,” a situation produced by colonisation (2011). Niger’s legal pluralism in family law via the coexistence of statutory, customary, and religious laws can be linked to its history as a former French colony.

that age when they're trying to make the case that girls should wait until 18 to get married."

In support of this sentiment, another Nigerien expert made the case that setting the legal age of marriage at 18 is a “*necessary, though insufficient*” condition to ensuring sustainable success of intervention programs to prevent, or to delay, child marriage. Both Nigerien and Ethiopian child marriage experts further explained why the law in itself is insufficient, arguing that legal threats are a poor means of enacting the level of social or religious norms change that is necessary to sustainably shift the population away from its entrenched positive – or at least, tolerant – attitudes towards, and strong motives for, child marriage.

From the standpoint of the legislative landscape on child marriage in Niger, it is thus possible that – even if the feasibility for success of the Berhane Hewan intervention program, in terms of the potential impact of its various components, is high – ensuring that the program can effect long-term, sustainable change may first require the implementation of firm minimum age of marriage legislation for girls. That being said, the Nigerien government’s efforts thus far to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 have been fruitless for a reason. Indeed, the observance of religious (Shari’a) law in particular, as described by Nigerien experts, is likely being protected by local religious leaders. These key stakeholders are likely to be fuelling the concerted resistance that is impeding efforts aiming to unify Niger’s legal framework and to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls.

There is thus an apparent tension between the law and religion in Niger – a tension that might be translated within the legal landscape to one between anti-child marriage advocates and the Nigerien people at large. Subsequently, it is important that future research be done into evaluating how to promote complementarity, rather than competition, between law and religion (particularly Islam) in Niger. Looking at the literature on this topic, Islamic and legal scholar An-Na’im argues that there is an innate complementarity and interdependence between law and religion, despite apparent perceptions of competing claims, because “the law needs religious sanction to legitimise the coercive authority of the law, while religion needs the coercive authority of the law to protect peace, social justice, and cohesion among all citizens equally, believers and non-believers alike” (2013). It is important that social scientists not lose sight of this complementarity and interdependence in their bid to eliminate child marriage in deeply religious societies like Niger, as efforts that result in the pitting of customary or religious norms against state law may alienate communities and thereby worsen the issue of child marriage. Indeed, An-Na’im’s work provides a starting roadmap to understanding, and to navigating, the very relationship that is causing tension in Niger’s legal landscape – that between “the positive law of the postcolonial state on the one hand, and Shari’a law as the normative system of Islam on the other” (2013).

In short, An-Na’im argues that the key to collaboration between Shari’a and state law as complementary, rather than competing, normative domains is in Muslims being

able to step away from absolute claims of an Islamic mandate for the enforcement of Shari'a law by the state (2013). Conducting such an exercise to shift perspectives among Niger's Muslim population in a sustainably impactful manner would necessarily involve mobilising and deriving input from community-based paralegal and national civil society legal partners, alongside local community leaders, and regional-level and national-level Nigerian government officials. With time, social and religious norms adaptation – in reflection of a better understanding (by all parties) of the complementarity and interdependence between religion and statutory law – may enable anti-child marriage advocates to more effectively push for an increase in the statutory minimum age of marriage for girls to 18. This prospect should not, however, be taken as a guarantee; evaluating the likelihood of such a possibility would require future research.

5. Criteria for a Successful Intervention Program

Interviewees expressed that intervention programs need to be sustainable long-term in order to actually be effective. This long-term sustainability depends on the existence of a number of criteria, including: (i) the tailoring of programs to the specific child marriage context and environment; (ii) partnerships with local government and community leaders; (iii) sustainable program cost and funding. These factors are important to assess when determining the feasibility for success of a replicated Berhane Hewan program in Niger.

(i) The Tailoring of Programs

Several interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring that intervention programs are tailored to fit to the specific local context and environment in which child marriage is occurring. One Ethiopian child marriage expert shared how the local environment impacted the outcomes of the recently replicated Berhane Hewan programs (left untailored) in Burkina Faso and Tanzania. In that study, the educational arm of the program had varying degrees of success, and revealed that poor educational attainment for girls carried different reasons in each context:

“the educational intervention arm of the study in Burkina Faso was not successful, in part because almost none of the parents had ever been to school themselves – they really didn't understand the value of education. Whereas in Tanzania, the parents actually had higher levels of education than their kids did – so they understood the importance of education, and were amenable to that option if given the support to buy the uniform and notebooks, etc. What was undermining their circumstances was that Tanzania just doesn't have a functional schooling system... That study really made me realise that we have to look more deeply at the landscape in each of these places that we work. Because, for instance, encouraging school attendance is a good strategy, but in some places, you don't have schools.”

Ensuring that the arms of the Berhane Hewan program respond directly to the drivers behind child marriage in Niger is thus critical analysis with respect to evaluating the feasibility of replicated success. This analysis is conducted in Section V Subsection 6 of this paper.

A Nigerien child marriage expert offered an example of a previous intervention program that was tailored to the local Nigerien environment – with relative success. She discusses how fertility – driven by a relatively young age at first childbirth by married girls ‘proving their fertility’ – is a particularly large issue in Niger, and thus focusing on delaying child birth is one strategy for delaying child marriage. The expert argued that focusing on the dangers of early childbirth – including the mother being at higher risk of obstetric fistula and the child being at higher risk for underdevelopment and morbidity – has been a strategy that has shown some promise in recent years, noting that:

“from our work, we’ve seen that girls have really responded well to this strategy. The risk of fistula has been an important factor for them to wish to postpone getting married.”

This evidence suggests that slight adjustments made to the focus and emphasis of the educational arm of the Berhane Hewan program would need to occur – for instance, placing greater emphasis on holding the ‘early marriage’, ‘safe motherhood’, and ‘family planning’ community conversations that were held in the pilot program in Amhara – if a replicated version is to be successful in Niger.

(ii) Partnerships with Local Government and Community Leaders

Key to the success of the Berhane Hewan program was the inclusion of local government and community leaders in the design and implementation of the various intervention strategies – in order to assure community support for and tolerance of the program. The evaluation report of the pilot program in Amhara notes that:

“project components were designed based on formative research and discussions with community members and key stakeholders. For example, early discussions with community members from the Amhara region revealed that economic motivations were one of the drivers of early marriage, and interest in establishing an incentive to delay marriage arose from the community itself. In addition, there was high demand among adolescents in the project area for educational opportunities.” (Erulkar, 2009)

The importance of involving local governments in intervention programs rests on the notion that these officials are regarded as “insiders” and carry a certain degree of influence over the community, argued an Ethiopian child marriage expert. Another Ethiopian child marriage expert corroborated this view – and went a step further to argue that, in areas where government officials may not carry such deep influence, religious or customary leaders can play important influencing roles too, noting that *“a religious leader taking the stance to not marry their own daughter might actually have a big effect.”*

This importance of getting local leaders involved in intervention programs was a sentiment carried over to the Nigerien context as well. One Nigerien child marriage expert argued that focusing on cultural change requires getting traditional (or religious) leaders, high-level politicians, and community leaders all involved. In particular, she argued, there should be a focus on traditional (or religious) leaders, who have a lot of decision-making power in their communities. Meanwhile, another Nigerien child marriage expert expressed promise surrounding support for child marriage intervention programs by political leaders in the country, mentioning that her organisation's program has *“achieved some key breakthroughs with political leaders, which they count among their greatest achievements of the program because of the impact that this will have on opening up the enabling environment required for the program to succeed.”*

It thus appears that getting local leaders in Niger to support child marriage intervention programs is not an impossible task – indeed, this may be particularly feasible among government officials. This fact is not surprising, since Niger has, at the national level, committed to eliminating child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Attaining the support of traditional and religious leaders, however, may be more challenging, given the tension that exists between statutory law and Shari'a law and custom. Again, however, this is not necessarily an impossible feat. Attaining this support may simply require a more nuanced approach – one that takes care not to pit Shari'a law or Islamic beliefs against the law, or to otherwise alienate these traditional and religious leaders.

(iii) Sustainable Program Cost and Funding

It goes without saying that the cost of any intervention program must be sustainable if the program is to be successful long-term, as without a means to pay for the program, it will quickly be forced to dissolve. This thus becomes a two-fold problem: finding ways to reduce the cost of the program, and ensuring there will be long-term funding and support to implement the intervention.

One way to make the cost of the program sustainable would be to implement only certain branches of the program (those with the highest potential impact), rather than the entire model, especially if the more comprehensive approach would come at the sacrifice of program quality. One Nigerien child marriage expert, speaking to her organisation's work in Niger, said that a realistic program facing cost constraints tries to focus on certain elements, rather than on doing every element at a mediocre level:

“child marriage is such a huge issue to tackle in a context like Niger. I think that programs, being realistic, try to break off a piece of it based on their own programming experience and where they've come from. So, when we talk about [our] program, I think if we move onto another round, the project will tighten its theory of change and focus on certain elements, rather than doing a little bit of everything.”

Another Nigerien child marriage expert noted that comprehensive programs in Niger have historically faced costing issues, given the poor supporting structures in place as a result of underdevelopment, and the limited investment that the country attracts. These cost issues are particularly acute when it comes to scaling programs up to the national level, she said, thereby requiring *“more innovative ideas to balance having a significant impact with the intervention and the expense that comes with scaling up on a higher level and reaching a high number of girls.”*

As a result, particularly when it comes to intervention programs in Niger, it is necessary to find the right balance between cost and impact – hard though this task may be – in order to preserve both the sustainability and the quality of the intervention. The recent studies conducted in Burkina Faso and Tanzania, whereby researchers evaluated the impact of both individual arms of the program and also of the comprehensive model (the entire program), revealed that a simpler intervention model in Burkina Faso led to a significant decrease in child marriage, which was a pattern not seen with the comprehensive model (Erulkar, 2020). The researchers hypothesised that this result may have been due to greater difficulties associated with implementing, and thus assuring the quality of, a more complex program (Erulkar, 2020). As a result, more research via a similar small-range study that tests and evaluates each branch of Berhane Hewan in the Niger context may be necessary before a firm decision can be made on the elements of the program that would be most impactful to replicate on a larger scale in the country.

Connected to costing the intervention program at the appropriate (and realistic) level is the need to assess the feasibility for long-term, sustainable funding and support for such a program. In speaking to interviewees working in the child marriage field – and often with organisations implementing their own programs in Niger – it is clear that there is funding available for this issue. The extent of the funding that is available is, however, perhaps less certain in Niger than in other, anglophone countries, for reasons described in Section V Subsection 1 of this paper. Additionally, one interviewee expressed that the programming landscape in Niger can be somewhat unstable due to the existence and impact of violent conflict:

“In Tillaberi, for example, there have been significant attacks on villages – terrorist attacks, NGO vehicles being lifted, NGO workers being kidnapped, etc. That has definitely made the work a lot harder from a logistical standpoint, and I know that a lot of programs have been scaled back – a lot of programs won’t even implement in areas that are ‘red zones.’ The work won’t happen in areas where there’s insecurity – especially when this work is engaging with really sensitive issues about gender and sexuality...it’s difficult to do that type of programming in a military conflict context.”

It is an unfortunate reality that child marriage intervention programs rely on a relatively stable environment – both from the standpoint of preserving the safety of all those involved in implementing the program, as well as from the standpoint of requiring certain conditions in order for the intervention strategies to feasibly carry positive impact.

Further monitoring of the conflict situation in Niger is thus likely to be necessary when determining the feasibility, timeline, and location for a replicated Berhane Hewan program. For it is likely that funding for such a program will only happen in those particular regions where there is a predetermined high likelihood for continued peace.

6. Feasibility for Success of Berhane Hewan in Niger

To add to the existing analysis, Nigerien expert interviewees were asked to speak directly to their opinion with respect to the feasibility for success of the Berhane Hewan program in its entirety, as well as of the individual arms of the program – from strategic, economic, and personnel standpoints – if implemented in Niger. A description of the Berhane Hewan program, as piloted in Ethiopia, can be found in Section II Subsection 1(vii) of this paper.

Interviewees overwhelmingly voiced that the feasibility of scaling the program – in any form – up to the national level would likely have to be a long-term goal for Niger, with regional implementation first being necessary to show proof of concept before a government partnership would be possible. One interviewee said:

“We’ve talked about the importance of a government partner when you try to scale up...one problem in Niger is that there is not yet a successful program that has taken place in the country that can be scaled up, so we are at least a 5 year NGO project cycle behind. We need proof of concept in the Nigerien context before we can talk about government investment and scale up.”

Combined with the fact that several regions of Niger face military conflict, it is thus likely that implementation of a “proof of concept” intervention program would have to occur in more peaceful regions of the country. Research would have to be done to determine which region would meet the appropriate peace standard at the time of implementation and carry a high likelihood of continued peace throughout the period of study.

Although the economic and personnel elements of the program may present certain challenges, interviewees did indicate that various arms of the Berhane Hewan program showed strategic promise. In other words, experts felt that the methods used in the program, if implemented in Niger, carry a strong potential to reduce, or to delay, child marriage in the country. Interviewees showed enthusiasm towards two particular arms of the program: the role of adult female mentors, and “community conversations” to engage the community in discussion of key issues (e.g. early marriage, family planning) and in collective problem solving. One expert argued that these two strategies would be especially important and effective strategies in the Nigerien context because of their abilities to change social norms:

“adult female mentors and community dialogue have been implemented in varying capacity in Niger...and have already shown promise in terms of changing social norms, which will lead to more sustained change as compared to economic incentives, which have more of an immediate payoff. Adult female mentors may be

particularly important because it's possible that girls don't have examples of what life might look like if they were to delay marriage, so only see [marriage] as a future for themselves... Accompanying this, community dialogue would engage stakeholders across entire communities in collective action, which, in addition to possibly allowing for delayed age at first marriage on their own, may create an enabling environment for young girls to advocate for themselves in situations pertaining to marriage."

Another Nigerien expert noted that working with the community through a values deliberation process towards the creation of new norms is *the* key strategy for bringing about long-term change in child marriage practices – in Niger and elsewhere. She argued that the careful and deliberate Berhane Hewan design for such community engagement has the potential to succeed in the Nigerien context, if implemented well by carrying sensitivity to cultural values and practices, as well as enforcing sustained engagement at the community level. She likewise argued that adult female mentors, ideally aged 22-25 years old, who could serve as examples of young women who successfully resisted social pressures to marry early (and instead pursued personal and professional development prior to marriage) would be a powerful asset within child marriage intervention programming in Niger. However, the same expert did voice concern surrounding the feasibility on a personnel level of this arm of the Berhane Hewan program, given that:

"identifying [adult female mentors] is a distinct challenge in Niger, as even women who have managed to delay their own marriages by several key years are mostly married by their early 20s with families and households to care for and may not be permitted to work outside of the home."

As a result, although leveraging adult female mentors is very likely to be a strategically successful method of reducing child marriage in Niger, it is also likely to be an infeasible option from a personnel standpoint in the short-term.

Interviewees showed conditional support for the other two arms of the Berhane Hewan program. These methods were (1) support (including economic incentive) to remain in school, and (2) participation in non-formal education (e.g. basic literacy and numeracy) and livelihood training for out-of-school girls. The consensus expressed is that such programs could be useful strategies in reducing, or delaying, child marriage in Niger, but only as part of a holistic programming package. In other words, these methods are unlikely to work individually, but rather only in combination with other arms of the program, or as part of the comprehensive program.

One Nigerien expert explained that economic incentives to keep girls in school, especially in rural areas and at beyond the primary school level, may not be a terribly effective strategy in and of itself given the lack of access to schools, as mentioned in Section V Subsection 3(i) of this paper. That said, she argues that, where schools *are* present, providing families with economic incentives could provide additional impetus – within a holistic programming package – to keep their daughters in school, by

counteracting some of the traditional gender norms that dictate girls' futures being in marriage post-puberty.

Similarly, the same expert argued that participation in non-formal education and livelihood training for out-of-school girls has the potential to bring about positive impact if implemented as part of a larger package that engages communities on social norms and expectations for girls, and works to develop alternate pathways to early marriage and child-bearing. It is incredibly important that the livelihood skills training operate in conjunction with other efforts to enact social norms change, the expert noted, as research from her organisation shows that women pursuing careers is a fairly taboo topic in Niger:

“through qualitative research in Niger (which drew from focus group discussions with adolescent girls and [their] parents in communities in Tillaberi and Maradi), we found that working to earn an income is not considered to be a desirable path for adolescent girls and women. Rather, it is a necessity if a husband is not able to provide for his family’s material needs or if a girl is unable to find a husband. This suggests that in order for livelihood skills training approaches to have their desired impact, programs must also engage at the girl- and community-level to reshape norms about what are acceptable and desirable pursuits and activities for women and girls.”

Therefore, both educational incentives and livelihood skills training are strategies that have the potential to work in Niger, but only as part of a more comprehensive, holistic model. In fact, livelihood skills training may be a more pertinent strategy to implement in Niger than the educational incentives method, given that such a large proportion of girls are already not enrolled in school, and improved access to school is unlikely to change anytime soon due to a lack of investment.

One interviewee pointed out the results from the implementation of the program in Burkina Faso as further evidence of how the various arms of the Berhane Hewan program are likely to play out in Niger, given the two countries' similar contexts. The study in Burkina Faso showed that community dialogue – systematically implemented using dedicated, paid facilitators who implemented a set curriculum among representatives of the community recruited for the dialogues – was a particularly effective arm of Berhane Hewan, both in delaying child marriage and in increasing school attendance (Erulkar, 2020). The strategy was also the cheapest arm of the program to implement in Burkina Faso, costing only US\$12 per person reached per year, versus \$13 for school supplies and fees, \$33 for conditional asset transfer, and \$60 for the comprehensive model (Erulkar, 2020). Although we cannot determine that these would be the exact costs for the various arms of the program if replicated in Niger, it is likely that the relative pricing between the different arms would show a similar structure, given that the same costing hierarchy was reflected in the Tanzania study of the program.

Given this data, it appears that, although the comprehensive model of the Berhane Hewan program, if implemented in Niger, would be likely to show success in reducing or delaying, child marriage, not every arm of the program is feasible on an economic and/or

personnel level – at least in the short-term. The “community conversations” arm of the Berhane Hewan program appears to be the only arm of the program that is feasible from all lenses (economic, personnel, and strategic) as a standalone method of reducing, or delaying, child marriage in Niger. Introducing adult female mentors into the community is a strategy that is highly likely to drive down child marriage rates; however, finding these mentors may be challenging in the near-term. Meanwhile, educational incentives and livelihood skills training will likely only be effective in reducing, or delaying, child marriage if these strategies are combined with other arms of the program, such as community dialogue.

VI. CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this project was to contextualise the practice of child marriage in Niger, and to thereby understand the endemism and strength of the specific obstacles that have plagued efforts to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in the world’s most afflicted country. Subsequently, this project aimed to determine whether or not Ethiopia’s successful Berhane Hewan intervention program to delay child marriage could feasibly be replicated with success in Niger.

Experts on child marriage – globally, as well as in the specific Ethiopian and Nigerien contexts – understand that the nature of the practice often differs between regions, let alone between countries, and vocalise that intervention programs must be tailored to fit local circumstances, if they are to have a chance at sustainably reducing, or delaying, child marriage. Nigerien experts also posit that Niger faces particular economic and geopolitical challenges – including a general lack of investment and military conflict – that may make the implementation of any intervention program especially difficult. That said, it appears that the Berhane Hewan model would likely be strategically successful in Niger, provided these non-strategic challenges are overcome; implementing the entire model may thus be a long-term goal, with the highest level of strategic efficacy to be achieved after the legal minimum age at marriage is raised to 18 years for girls. In the short-term, in order both to start effecting positive change at the local level and to provide a “proof of concept” to support scaling the intervention program up to the national level, policymakers and NGO workers should consider implementing at least one arm of the Berhane Hewan model – namely, the “community conversations” stratagem – in a couple of regions in Niger.

1. Summary of Key Findings

In short: Analysis of the population demographics of Ethiopia’s rural Amhara region and Niger, as well as the types and drivers of child marriage in these two contexts, revealed several key similarities, which indicate a replicated Berhane Hewan program is likely to be strategically successful in Niger. There do exist, however, a number of

economic, personnel, and geopolitical challenges unique to Niger that are likely to make implementing the program in its entirety less feasible in the short-term. As a result, although all components of the program are likely to be strategically successful, it is important to note that certain components carry more promise than others, for purposes of having to prioritise which strategies to implement on a standalone basis in the short-term. The most promising component of the program for standalone implementation in Niger in the short term is “community conversations”; other components may be either difficult from economic or personnel standpoints or less impactful as a standalone strategy but are likely to show promise if implemented as part of a holistic model. Following proof of concept of the individual, and most promising, strategies of Berhane Hewan on a smaller-scale, the entire model could then be implemented on a nationwide scale with government backing and other funding support.

Extended summary: Importantly, both rural Ethiopia and rural Niger share key similarities in their high rates of early (pre-15) marriage, and most child marriages in Amhara and in Niger are forced, with girls having little agency to make their own choices. These similar trends stem from a similar lack of access to education in both contexts, combined with traditional gender roles that narrow the options available to, and the expectations for, girls to marriage and motherhood. Although cultural norms and traditions associated with child marriage are stronger in Niger, and household poverty is a stronger driver of child marriage in Amhara, experts feel these differences are not deciding ones. Rather, these key similarities indicate that the strategies of the Berhane Hewan program carry a high likelihood of success if implemented in Niger. Even though the population demographics are different in both contexts (particularly with respect to language and religion), and thus the implementation of strategies in Niger may require a little adjustment in response to local religious and cultural sensitivities, it appears that all the arms of the Berhane Hewan intervention program remain strategically relevant methods of reducing, or at least delaying, child marriage in Niger.

Although there is a gap in official demographic and health data for Niger, interviewees felt fairly confident in their discussions of the types and drivers of child marriage in the country, due to their personal – and organisational – research and efforts to prevent child marriage in more recent years. Drawing on their own experiences implementing intervention studies and programs in Niger and Ethiopia, interviewees voiced that the strategies employed in the Berhane Hewan program were all likely to delay the age at first marriage, if not reduce the rate of child marriage, in Niger – though these strategies would, perhaps, have to be prioritised differently.

Namely, while economic incentives appeared to be a particularly important solution in Amhara (as posited by local officials, and evidenced by the pilot program), it is likely that this strategy would only work as part of a larger, holistic program in Niger. A strong need to change social norms and customs, if one hopes to enact sustainable (and thus meaningful) change in Niger, would require a much greater emphasis on a well designed and implemented program of community dialogue, covering topics of particular

pertinence to the local context. Given that conservative gender norms and the high fertility rate are inextricably linked to early marriage in Niger, suggested topics for these “community conversations” would include: early marriage, family planning, and safe motherhood. Therefore, economic incentives (and livelihood skills trainings), if implemented, would have to be introduced in conjunction with – and second to – these “community conversations.”

Furthermore, while experts believe that the strategy of employing adult female mentors – to show girls that early marriage is not their only option – would, as was the case in Amhara, empower girls to speak up for themselves and encourage them to delay their marriages by a few key years, this strategy may not be feasible in Niger – at least in the short-term. This is because the strength of traditional gender norms in Niger make it likely that there simply does not currently exist a substantively large pool of girls who would fit the desired characteristics of a mentor, or who would be allowed to become mentors (by their husbands or fathers). It is possible that this strategy could be implemented in Niger at a later time, in order to accelerate positive change, after other arms of the program have started to show some success in delaying the age at first marriage by initiating critical gender progressive social norms change.

Modern-day Niger faces a number of economic, personnel, and geopolitical issues that were not as apparent – or relevant – during the Berhane Hewan pilot program in Amhara in 2004-2006. Of primary concern is that Niger seems not to attract as much foreign investment or aid as do other countries on the African continent. This lack of investment may be due, on the one hand, to issues faced by the French language barrier (as most work tends to be driven by English-speaking agencies), and, on the other hand, to issues of military conflict, which drive NGO researchers and workers out of particular regions. Attracting the degree of funding (from both the foreign and domestic fronts) that is necessary to scale a version of the Berhane Hewan program to the national level would likely first require: (1) a smaller-scale local, or regional, implementation study in order to show “proof of concept” and convince donors and funders of the strategic efficacy of the program in practice, and (2) a ratification of the minimum age marriage law at 18 for girls, which a national intervention program could lean on for support while enacting strategies that push for social norms upheaval.

2. Policy Recommendations

(i) Short-term

- I. Work with local community leaders and government officials to tailor the design and implementation of the Berhane Hewan program to the specific local context, even within Niger*

Although the various arms of the Berhane Hewan program are strategically likely to be successful in reducing, or delaying, child marriage in Niger, it is important that researchers and investigators work with local community leaders and government

officials to tweak and tailor these stratagems. This will ensure that the program is at its most cost-effective, as working to tailor programs to local contexts – which local stakeholders are most equipped to speak to and assist with – enables strategies to maximise their efficiency.

- II. Show proof of concept: Implement two local, or regional, implementation studies (both in rural Niger) of two versions of Berhane Hewan: (1) “community conversations”, (2) “community conversations” and livelihood skills training*

From an economic standpoint, due to a lack of current investment from abroad into Niger and the country’s limited budget as a developing nation, it is important to first prove the success of the Berhane Hewan program in the Nigerien context at the local, or regional, level. This proof of concept is important in order to have a more grounded argument for scaling the program up to the national level (which is costlier and thus requires more funding). Since the “community conversations” arm of the program is likely to be the most effective, and the cheapest, arm of the program in Niger, the short-term local study should prioritise implementing this stratagem. It would also be wise to implement a second study that includes an additional arm of the Berhane Hewan – livelihood skills training – in order to prove experts’ insights that a more holistic programming model is likely to have even more successful results in the Nigerien context.

(ii) Medium-term

- III. Work to improve access to education in rural areas of Niger*

A consistent concern among interviewees was that, although education has been shown to be a powerful strategy for empowering women and reducing child marriage rates, the strategy depends on strong infrastructure – i.e. the existence of enough schools and teachers. At present, an overwhelmingly large proportion of Niger’s children in rural areas drop out of school at an early age because there are few schools near where they live. Anti-child marriage advocates should thus encourage Niger’s government to invest in developing rural areas – particularly, with respect to building schools and investing in teachers. Where possible, they may also work to source independent funding for rural development in the form of foreign aid and investment.

(iii) Long-term

- IV. Add economic incentives and source adult female mentors to the local studies, and scale the program up to the national level*

From all standpoints, it makes sense for advocates and researchers to prioritise the economic incentives and adult female mentors arms of the Berhane Hewan program as long-term goals in Niger. Economic incentives are likely to be cost-effective strategies only if girls in rural areas have greater access to education (i.e. after more

schools have been built). Meanwhile, adult female mentors will likely be difficult to source in the near-term, as the high prevalence of child marriage and traditional gender norms mean that there are likely to be few women in their early 20s who are either unmarried, or, if married, would be allowed by their husbands to act as mentors. Subsequently, advocates should work to implement the tailored version(s) of the Berhane Hewan program – ideally in its entirety, if funds allow – at the national scale, so that as many girls as is possible can be reached in Niger.

V. *Mobilise community-based paralegal and national civil society legal partners, alongside local community leaders, and region-level and national-level government officials, to help assess the obstacles that have impeded attempts to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls, and to determine how to overcome these obstacles*

Interviewees connected many of the challenges that child marriage intervention programs face in Niger to the fact that these programs cannot lean on the law for support. They voiced that global child marriage advocacy trends have shown that the law acts as a necessary, though insufficient, force for change on this issue, and so see an increase in the minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls as a prerequisite for a sustainable, long-term reduction in the child marriage rate in Niger. From the point of view of stated goals, Niger's government has made several commitments to end child marriage and to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls, as described in Section II Subsection 3(v) of this paper. Its efforts to raise the age restriction to 18 thus far have been unsuccessful for a reason – reportedly, due to concerted resistance from local religious leaders. A lot of thought and research must therefore be directed to ascertaining and assessing the exact obstacles to adjusting Niger's legal framework and to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls – an important exercise that necessarily will involve mobilising and deriving input from community-based paralegal and national civil society legal partners, alongside local community leaders, and region-level and national-level government officials in Niger. This is an important step towards determining how successfully to overcome objections and barriers to raising the minimum age of marriage for girls, and to start effecting the type of incremental social and religious norms adaptations necessary to delegitimise the practice of child marriage over time.

3. Future Research

Interviewees revealed the importance of working together with key stakeholders in the community in order to tailor intervention programs to the particular local context, ensuring that the design and implementation of such programs reach the maximum desired efficacy and impact. As such, researchers and workers implementing versions of the Berhane Hewan program (whether in parts or in its entirety) should interview and discuss the various stratagems, or arms, with these stakeholders. These include local

community leaders and government officials, but also girls affected by child marriage and their parents. When determining the region(s) in which to implement the program in the short-term, careful research should be done to ensure that a region where sustainable funding can be directed to is chosen, i.e. a region without present (or a high likelihood of future) military conflict.

VII. REFERENCES

- African Development Bank Group (AFDB). (2020). 'Niger Economic Outlook.' Accessed at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-west-africa-niger/niger-economic-outlook>
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi A. (2013). 'Complementary, Not Competing, Claims of Law and Religion: An Islamic Perspective.' *Pepperdine Law Review*, Volume 39, Issue 5. *Symposium: The Competing Claims of Law and Religion*. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol39/iss5/10>
- Batha, Emma. (2017). 'Factbox: The hidden economic costs of child marriage.' Reuters. June 27, 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-worldbank-childmarriage-factbox-idUSKBN19I1QD>
- Braimah, Tim S. (2014). 'Child marriage in Northern Nigeria: Section 61 of Part I of the 1999 Constitution and the protection of children against child marriage.' *African Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol.14 No.2. Accessed at: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S1996-20962014000200009&script=sci_arttext&tlng=es
- Central Statistical Agency [Ethiopia] and ORC Macro. (2006). *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2005* (Ethiopia DHS 2005). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Calverton, Maryland, USA: Central Statistical Agency and ORC Macro. Retrieved from: [https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR179/FR179\[23June2011\].pdf](https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR179/FR179[23June2011].pdf)
- Central Statistical Agency (CSA) [Ethiopia] and ICF. (2016). *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016* (Ethiopia DHS 2016). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: CSA and ICF. Retrieved from: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR328/FR328.pdf>
- Chowdhury, Farah Deeba. (2004). 'The socio-cultural context of child marriage in a Bangladeshi village.' *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 13:244-253. Accessed at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1369-6866.2004.00318.x>
- Cislaghi, Benimino, Gerry Mackie et al. (2019). 'Social norms and child marriage in Cameroon: An application of the theory of normative spectrum.' *Global Public Health*,

Volume 14, Issue 10. Accessed at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17441692.2019.1594331>

Clark, Dartunorro. (2019). 'Child marriage is a global scourge. Here's how Ethiopia is fighting it.' NBC News. December 14, 2019. Accessed at:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/child-marriage-global-scourge-here-s-how-ethiopia-fighting-it-n1084041>

Ennaji, Moha. (2019). 'Child marriage is stalling sustainable development.' World Economic Forum. October 18, 2019. Accessed at:

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/10/sustainable-development-goals-hindered-by-child-marriage/>

Erulkar, A. & E. N. Muthengi. (2009). *Evaluation of Berhane Hewan: A program to delay child marriage in rural Ethiopia*. International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health 35(1): 6-14. Retrieved from:

https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/article_files/3500609.pdf

Erulkar, A., G. Medhin, et al. (2020). *Designing and evaluating scalable child marriage prevention programs in Burkina Faso and Tanzania: A quasi-experiment and costing study*. Global Health: Science and Practice 8(1): 68-81. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ghspjournal.org/content/ghsp/8/1/68.full.pdf>

Ferguson, Sarah. (2019). 'Using Soccer to End Child Marriage in Niger.' UNICEF USA. October 10, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/using-soccer-end-child-marriage-niger/36486>

Gaffney-Rhys, Ruth. (2011). 'International Law as an instrument to combat child marriage.' *The International Journal of Human Rights, Volume 15, Issue 3*. Accessed at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642980903315398?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

Girls Not Brides. (2020). 'About Child Marriage.' Accessed at:

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

Graves, Alisha, Lorenzo Rosa, et al. (2019). 'Avert catastrophe now in Africa's Sahel.'

Nature, Volume 575. Accessed at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03445-z>

Human Development Report. (2019). 'Niger'. Accessed at:

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/NER.pdf

ICRW. (2006). 'Child Marriage and Education.' Accessed at:

<https://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Education.pdf>

ICRW. (2006). 'Child Marriage and Poverty.' Accessed at:
<https://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Poverty.pdf>

Institut National de la Statistique (INS) et ICF International. (2013). [French]. *Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples du Niger 2012* (Niger DHS 2012). Calverton, Maryland, USA : INS et ICF International. Retrieved from:
<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR277/FR277.pdf>

Masquelier, Adeline. (2005). 'The Scorpion's Sting: Youth, Marriage and the Struggle for Social Maturity in Niger.' *Royal Anthropological Institute*. Accessed at:
<https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00226.x>

Miller, Michelle J. (2015). 'Stop Forced Child Marriage: A Comparative Global Law Analysis.' *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*. Vol:9, No:11. Accessed at:
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/37ee/7bdb210813569ddf4438bca56622d0d9cddf.pdf>

Nour, Nawal M. (2009). 'Child Marriage: A Silent Health and Human Rights Issue.' *Reviews in Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2(1):51-56. Accessed at:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2672998/>

Pankhurst, Alula. (2014). 'Child Marriage and Female Circumcision (FGM/C): Evidence from Ethiopia.' *Young Lives*. Accessed at: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:70808644-dee9-408c-9162-de0ec3f317b8/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=YL-PolicyBrief-21_Child%2BMarriage%2Band%2BFGM%2Bin%2BEthiopia.pdf&type_of_work=General+item

Perlman, Daniel, Fatima Adamu, & Quentin Wodon. (2017). 'Understanding and Ending Child Marriage: Insights from Hausa Communities.' Accessed at:
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56c8133a27d4bd3fdb27af58/t/5bc0f7178165f5ad870a64a4/1539372920277/Girls+Ed+and+EM.pdf>

Petroni, Suzanne, Mara Steinhaus, Natacha Stevanovic Fenn, et al. (2017). 'New Findings on Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa.' *Annals of Global Health*, Vol. 83, No. 5-6, 781-790. Accessed at:
<https://www.annalsofglobalhealth.org/articles/abstract/10.1016/j.aogh.2017.09.001/>

Plan International. (2017). 'President of Niger Commits to Ending Child Marriage.' Accessed at: <https://plan-international.org/news/2017-09-14-president-niger-commits-ending-child-marriage>

Population Council. (2019). 'More than Brides Alliance: Midline Evaluation Report.' Accessed at: https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2019PGY_MTBA-Midline.pdf

Population Council. 'Testing Effective Approaches to End Child Marriage.' (n.d.). Accessed at: <https://www.popcouncil.org/research/testing-effective-approaches-to-end-child-marriage>

Samandari, Ghazaleh, Carolyn Grant, et al. (2019). "'It is a thing that depends on God": barriers to delaying first birth and pursuing alternative futures among newly married adolescent girls in Niger.' *Reproductive Health, Volume 16, Issue 109*. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6637607/>

Save the Children. (n.d.). 'Child marriage in Niger.' Accessed at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/13236/pdf/child-marriage-niger.pdf>

Selby, Daniele and Carmen Singer. (2019). 'Child Marriage: Everything You Need to Know.' Global Citizen. August 27, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/child-marriage-brides-india-niger-syria/>

Spangler, Micha, & Jordie Hannum. (2019). '2020 Could be Niger's Year of Reckoning.' *Foreign Policy*. Accessed at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/20/niger-united-states-deployment-regional-stability-2020-could-change/>

Steinhaus, M. and Kes, A. (2018). *Child Marriage and Food Security in Niger*. International Center for Research on Women. Accessed at: https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ICRW_EICM_FoodSecurity_Niger_v2-Web.pdf

Tamanaha, Brian Z. (2011). 'The Rule of Law and Legal Pluralism in Development.' *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law, 3:1-17*. Accessed at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1017/S1876404511100019>

The World Bank. (2017). 'Educating Girls, Ending Marriage.' Accessed at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2017/08/22/educating-girls-ending-child-marriage>

The World Bank. (2020). 'The World Bank in Niger.' Accessed at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview>

UN Human Rights Council. (2016). 'Universal Periodic Review: Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Niger.' Accessed at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/075/23/PDF/G1607523.pdf?OpenElement>

UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR. (2019). 'Nigeria emergency.' Accessed at: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/nigeria-emergency.html>

UN Women. (2019). 'Multi-Country Analytical Study of Legislation, Policies, Interventions and Cultural Practices on Child Marriage in Africa.' Accessed at: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20africa/attachments/publications/2019/multicountry%20analytical%20study%20of%20policies%20interventions%20%20cultural%20practices%20on%20child%20marriage%20in%20afr.pdf?la=en&vs=2727>

UNICEF. 'Children in Niger'. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.unicef.org/niger/children-niger>

UNICEF. (2005). *The State of the World's Children 2005. Childhood Under Threat*. Retrieved from: [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2005_\(English\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2005_(English).pdf)

UNICEF. (2019). *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a changing world*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/63016/file/SOWC-2019.pdf>

UNICEF. 'UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.' (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.unicef.org/protection/unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage>

United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). (2020). 'Africa: Niger.' Accessed at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_ng.html

Wodon, Quentin & Suzanne Petroni. (2017). 'The rippling economic impacts of child marriage.' World Bank Blogs. June 27, 2017. Accessed at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/rippling-economic-impacts-child-marriage>

World Population Review. (2020). 'Niger Population.' Accessed at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/niger-population>

Zerzan, Rebecca. (2015). 'Top 10 myths about child marriage.' United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Accessed at: <https://www.unfpa.org/news/top-10-myths-about-child-marriage>

VIII. APPENDIX

Table 1: Age at first marriage data by age group among women in Niger aged 15-49 (Niger DHS, 2012)

Age group	% women who were in their first marriage by age					Median age at first marriage
	15	18	20	22	25	
15-19	23.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A
20-24	28.0	76.3	89.1	N/A	N/A	16.0
25-29	29.9	75.9	86.6	92.8	96.8	15.9
30-34	29.6	77.1	87.7	93.9	96.9	15.7
35-39	28.6	77.1	87.3	94.0	96.4	15.8
40-44	31.4	75.0	86.9	94.0	96.7	15.7
45-49	33.6	83.5	90.7	94.2	96.8	15.6

Note: Age at first marriage was defined in the Niger's 2012 Demographic and Health Survey as the age at which a woman starts to live with her first husband/partner.

N/A = Not available due to lack of, or incomplete, data.

A = Not calculated because fewer than 50% of women had started to live with their husband/partner for the first time at an age earlier than 15.

Table 2: Niger's HDI trends based on consistent time series data and new goalposts (Human Development Report, 2019)

Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	HDI value
1990	43.5	2.1	0.7	872	0.213
1995	46.6	2.4	0.9	762	0.230
2000	49.9	2.9	1.1	748	0.253
2005	53.4	3.6	1.3	761	0.283
2010	57.3	4.7	1.5	806	0.319
2015	60.6	6.0	1.8	884	0.360
2016	61.1	6.1	1.9	892	0.365
2017	61.6	6.5	2.0	901	0.373
2018	62.0	6.5	2.0	912	0.377

Note: An explanation of how the HDI value is calculated can be found in the technical notes of Niger's 2019 Human Development Report.

GNI per capita (2011 PPS\$) = Gross National Income (GNI) per person expressed in constant 2011 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) conversation rates.

Table 3: Distribution of interviewees by area of expertise and organisation

Area of expertise	Organisation	Interviewee	Position
General	UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health	Anvita Dixit	Pre-Doctoral Fellow under Anita Raj, PhD, MS
Ethiopia	Population Council	Annabel Erulkar, PhD	Country Director; Principal Investigator for the Berhane Hewan program
	Young Lives	Alula Pankhurst, PhD	Country Director
Niger	Population Council	Sajeda Amin, PhD	Senior Associate, Steering Committee for the More Than Brides Alliance
		Andrea J. “AJ” Melnikas, DrPH, MPH	Research Analyst, More Than Brides Alliance
		Grace Saul, MPH	Project Coordinator, More Than Brides Alliance
	UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health	Sneha Challa	Pre-Doctoral Fellow under Anita Raj, PhD, MS
	UNFPA	Satvika Chalasani, PhD, MA	Technical Specialist – Lead on Ending Child Marriage
	UNFPA Niger	Maria Storrusten, MSPH	Technical Specialist – Women and Girls’ Empowerment, Gender Equality and Population Dynamics

Table 4: Interview guide and example questions

Interview questions were modified depending on the expert’s particular area or region of expertise. That said, all interviewees were asked questions that fell into several, or all, of the themes that are included below. The order of and emphasis on questions covering each theme shifted depending on the flow of the conversation.

Theme 1: Types of child marriage
<p><u>Example questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the main type(s) of child marriage that occurs in [region/country]? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --- Forced or voluntary marriage? --- Average age at first marriage (how early are marriages occurring)? --- Polygyny/Polygamy? --- Other determinants of the type of marriage
Theme 2: Factors that drive child marriage
<p><u>Example questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the main drivers of child marriage in [country], and what evidence is there to support this? - To what extent do the drivers of child marriage vary by region in [country]? - What are the obstacles that still exist in [region/country] that are impeding progress on the issue of child marriage? Are these short- or long-term obstacles? Can these obstacles be realistically overcome?
Theme 3: The efficacy of existing legislation to prevent the practice
<p><u>Example questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has existing legislation been effective in preventing child marriage in [country]? Why or why not? - Is the government/society in [country] keen to, or at least on board with, prevent child marriage – especially in scenarios where legislation is not working? In other words, is there institutional and community support on the ground to end the practice?
Theme 4: The efficacy of previous and/or existing non-legal interventions to prevent child marriage
<p><u>Example questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How effective are national/international level interventions, versus local/community level interventions, with respect to preventing child marriage? - How scalable is [your organisation's/a particular] approach or intervention to prevent child marriage (nationally and internationally)? - Must interventions to end child marriage be entirely tailored to individual communities/regions, or is scalability possible? - In your opinion, what needs to happen [in region/country] for there to be a tangible reduction in child marriage? What would need to change in the environment/culture, and how which strategies could enable such change?
Theme 5: The feasibility for success if the Berhane Hewan program were implemented in Niger
<p><u>Example questions:</u></p>

- If you are aware of the Berhane Hewan program, do you think that a similar program would be successful in Niger / in specific regions of Niger? Why or why not?
- If you think the program WOULD be successful in Niger: do you think the program would be successful in Niger at the same targeted age group (10-19)? Why or why not?
- Looking at the various components of the program (listed below), which of these, if any, do you think would work to prevent / delay child marriage in Niger (or particular regions)? Why?
 - Adult female mentors
 - Support (including economic incentive) to remain in school
 - Participation in non-formal education (e.g. basic literacy and numeracy) and livelihood training for out-of-school girls
 - “Community conversations” to engage the community in discussion of key issues (e.g. early marriage) and in collective problem solving
- If you do NOT think that the program would be successful in Niger, what would have to change or be different (either in Niger or in the program) in order for you to think otherwise?
- Does Niger possess the resources and capabilities to make an intervention like Berhane Hewan sustainable, and therefore feasible?