

## Youth transitions to adulthood in rural communities (2010-13) WIDE Discussion Brief No. 4 of 10<sup>i</sup>

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### Key messages from the WIDE evidence

- Youth transitions to adulthood can be usefully conceptualized in terms of 15 **gendered transitions** including 6 **personal**: puberty, circumcision, sexual initiation, work skills, education, identity; 3 **work**: home-related work, income-generating work, economic independence; 3 **family**: marriage, independent household, having children; and 3 **community**: social networks, community-initiated organisations, local citizenship.
- Transitions to adulthood **for girls** tend to happen **earlier** than for boys. However certain youth transitions such as circumcision and child marriage are subject to considerable **cultural variation** in the timing and procedures involved.
- **Youth** tend to be thought of as **young men**, and **less attention** is given to **young women** except about early marriage.
  - More attention to **young women's productive roles, young men's reproductive roles**, and **couples** establishing **independent livelihoods** would be useful.
  - **Interventions** to improve youth transition need to **address productive** and **reproductive issues** facing the youth as well as **cultural values**.
- Interventions affecting **girls' transitions** have focused on **child marriage** and **stopping female genital cutting** (FGC).
- Interventions often seek to **impose the bans** rather than **understanding the rationales**, convincing people of the **need for change**, and avoiding the **risks of imposing change**.
- There has been **resistance in some communities** from parents and adolescents. Some **early marriages continue** to take place in most communities, and **FGC continues to be practiced secretly** in some communities, potentially becoming more dangerous.
  - **Interventions** to eliminate FGC should **coordinate stakeholder involvement** and **integrate approaches** with community and customary leaders, parents, schools, health extension workers, and especially girls as well as boys.
  - Interventions on **ending child marriage** should focus on **consent** to avoid forced marriages, and promoting **birth registration** can resolve ambiguities about girls' ages.
  - The **problems older adolescent girls face** with **access to contraception**, often leading to **unsafe abortion** in cases of pregnancy, should be reviewed, with **special dispensations for minors** if unable to support a child, and promotion of **child care provisions**.
  - **Special dispensations for 16-18 years olds** to get married as happens in a number of countries could be envisaged **with oversight by appropriate institutions**.
  - In enforcing the law on **forced abduction** this should be distinguished from

**‘voluntary abduction’ or consensual marriage**, which is sometimes a way for young couples to make their own choices and **avoid parentally imposed marriages and brideprice costs**.

- There have been initiatives to introduce **sex education** and **girls’ toilets in schools** and in some sites to provide them with **sanitary materials**. However, there has been less attention to **broader reproductive health issues** facing adolescent girls and boys.
  - **Adolescent girls’ nutritional needs, separate toilets and sanitary materials, and sex education** through schools and parents, should build on **examples of good practice**.
  - **Youth sexual health** should give more prominence to **contraception access**, support in cases of **pre-marital pregnancies**, addressing problems with unsafe **abortions** and **child bearing**, involving young men and parents as well as young women.
- The key issues facing **adolescent girls** go beyond FGC, child marriage and reproductive health and are more to do with **education, training, employment, enterprise, migration**.
- **Girls’ education** has been promoted in **primary education**. However, there has been limited attention to **options for training and skills development** for older adolescent girls.
  - **Alternatives** to early marriage through **training and employment** should be promoted.
  - Options for **young women’s productive roles** should be given more attention, including **access to credit**, their greater involvement in **youth and women’s cooperatives**, and promotion of **business and enterprise**.
- Youth work transitions are affected by **limited land access** and **un(der)employment**. However, youth are involved a **wide range of income-generating** activities.
- **Non-agricultural youth cooperatives** have been more successful than agricultural ones, and many **youth cooperatives have faced problems** of credit, training, leadership, management and competition.
- **Youth community transitions** are constrained due to **control of resources by the older generation** and **limited opportunities for employment and income generation**.
- **Youth** in some sites have become **more involved in religion** and less in community affairs.
- Youth organisations have focused on **political mobilisation** with **limited promotion of economic opportunities**.
- **Young women’s** involvement in **youth cooperatives, associations and community affairs** is **constrained by gender norms and lack of promotion**.
  - **Micro and Small Scale Enterprises** should be expanded through small towns and *kebele* centres to rural areas, and **individual and group entrepreneurship** of young men and young women should be promoted.
  - The relative success of **non-agricultural cooperatives in rural areas** should be replicated.
  - Promoting greater involvement of **youth groups in economic activities** and **support to women’s participation** could enhance **the role of youth in community affairs**.

## Introduction

This brief uses data from the Ethiopia WIDE research to describe youth transitions in twenty rural communities during 2010-13. Among the **15 transitions** described falling into **4 categories**: personal, family, work and community, the brief focuses on those that have been the subject of interventions with less emphasis on areas covered in the other briefs in this series.

## Understanding youth transitions

**Youth** tend to be thought of in terms of young men, with less attention to young women. Interventions for **young people** focus on reproduction for young women and on production for young men, often neglecting productive roles of young women, and reproductive roles of young men. Moreover, youth transitions **consider young men and young women separately** and are often not analysed in gender terms involving *formation of new households*, with couples establishing *joint livelihoods and families*.

- More attention to **young women's productive roles, young men's reproductive roles, and couples** establishing **independent livelihoods** would be useful.

Youth transitions to adulthood can be conceptualized in terms of **personal, social and community transitions** with **gender and age dimensions**. There are complex interactions between interventions and youth transition some of which are **direct** and other **indirect** or contributory. Interventions can be analysed in terms of **who implements them where** and **what activities** are involved.

**Passages to adulthood** involve **fifteen personal and social transitions** or boundary-crossings of varying types and durations. There are six **personal transitions**: 1) *physical maturation and puberty* 2) *youth circumcision* in some cultures but not present in others, 3) *sexual initiation*, 4) *acquiring work skills*, 5) *completing formal education* and 6) *development of a personal/social identity*. There are three **work-related transitions**: 1) *establishing home-related work careers*, 2) *'income' generating work strategies*, 3) *gaining economic independence*. There are two types of **social transitions** of which three are **family-related**: 1) *getting married*, 2) *establishing an independent household*, and 3) *having children*; and three are **community transitions**, involving participation in 1) *social network exchanges*, 2) *community-initiated organisations*, and 3) *local religious and political 'citizenship'*. Each transition involve milestones or boundary crossings with differences by sex and age. Culturally many of the transitions typically **occur earlier for women than men**.

Changes affecting transitions are related to **wider transformations** in rural communities associated with **modernisation processes**, including a considerable **increase in public investment**, some aid-funded, in infrastructure, **economic and human development, social protection, gender equity** and local **governance** structures. Some **development interventions** were designed to bring changes to specific transitions, for example raising the age of marriage to 18 and the push to universal primary education. Others designed to meet **objectives not specifically related to youth**, such as the consolidation of land 'ownership' and the increasing availability of contraceptives, can have had **unanticipated consequences** for youth passages. Interventions often come into conflict with widely held cultural norms and values that require judicious approaches to bring about change (DB06:maternity).

- **Interventions** to improve youth transition need to **address productive and reproductive issues** facing the youth as well as **cultural values**.

Relations between transitions and interventions can be considered from **"top down"** and **"bottom up"** perspectives. The former views ways in which broadly defined **sectoral interventions** for instance in education, health, agriculture, food security and poverty reduction, relate to the major

categories of transitions and the latter looks at **specific transitions** and what forms of interventions affect them. Interventions are **more common** in the **personal and work and family transitions** with less emphasis on community ones. The biggest focus areas of interventions are on **education completion**, and for women on the **prevention of HTP notably FGM/C and child marriage**.

### Personal transitions

In this section we focus on puberty, circumcision and sexual initiation, also addressed in the brief on maternal/infant health (*DB06:maternity*) whereas education transitions are covered in another brief (*DB05:education*).

#### Puberty

Issues related to puberty include **nutritional needs** related to growth spurts, where **PSNP and emergency aid** can have an important role, **availability of sanitary materials** and **toilets for girls in schools**, and **sex education** from parents and schools. **Sanitary materials for girls** were provided in only four sites through schools, including **emergency provision** and a system of girls contributing monthly payments for distributions by teachers or girls clubs.

- **Adolescent girls' nutritional needs, separate toilets and sanitary materials, and sex education** through schools and parents, should be further prioritised building on **examples of good practice**.

#### Circumcision/FGC

Both **male and female circumcision** are common in most parts of Ethiopia though most policy attention has focussed on FGC. Male circumcision was not practiced in two villages in SNNPR (Adado and Luqa). In the North male circumcision took place in infancy shortly after birth; in Oromo societies traditionally it was linked to the Gada age-set initiations so boys or men of different ages were circumcised together. **Interventions** involved promoting circumcision in health centres when boys were **infants**, avoiding **group circumcisions** due to assumed HIV risks, and persuading groups not doing so **to introduce the practice**. Reactions to interventions led **to some change** but there was also resistance, with circumcisions still **largely carried out in homes**, though circumcision at **older ages** has been **declining**.

**Female circumcision or genital cutting** (FGC), which through the campaigns to eradicate it has come to be termed **Female Genital Mutilation** (FGM), was an important **part of the cultural repertoire** in much of Ethiopia. Out of the 20 WIDE sites FGC was not traditionally practiced in two SNNPR sites (Adado and Luqa). In Tigray it was eradicated during the TLPF period. The **timing differed**: In **Amhara** it was carried out in **infancy** in the fortnight after birth (7-11 days), whereas **elsewhere** it was performed **around puberty** as a necessary prelude to marriage, or in pre-puberty years. Apparently in two sites it has recently been performed somewhat earlier to avoid the ban (Aze Debo'a, Oda Haro), whereas in another it took place later with marriages delayed given the ban (Gara Godo).

**Rationales** can be divided into **cultural** ones related to notions of cleanliness, purity, taboo and shame and aesthetics and **social** ones suggesting that uncircumcised women would face problems getting married, having sex, conceiving or giving birth, facing insults and stigma, and that circumcision would restrain women's sexual urges, preventing pre-marital and extra-marital sex, linked to broader notions of controlling women.

**Four categories of actors** have played roles in intervening to try to prevent female circumcision: 1) **Government**, 2) **NGOs** and international organisations, 3) **religious groups** and 4) **local organisations**

and institutions. Interventions included 1) **awareness raising** campaigns involving women’s affairs offices, schools and HEWs 2) **legislative and judicial** measures including threats or actual prosecutions of circumcisers and parents and 3) holding up non-circumcised girls as **role models**.

**Reactions to interventions** depended on 1) the extent to which the **custom was culturally salient**, 2) **types of interventions**, extents to which they were pursued, and integration of approaches; 3) **regional approaches** to HTPs, 4) whether **cultural, ethnic or religious identities** and **symbolisms** were articulated in opposition to the ban, 5) **linkages with other interventions** and changes, and 6) **remoteness** when the research was carried out. Understanding the **extent of change** and **decline** is complex. In the two **Tigray** sites FGC was **eliminated** during the TPLF period. Among the four sites in **Amhara** the custom was a fairly strong part of the cultural repertoire and the **ban was enforced** with increasing attention over time, with some continued resistance. Among the five **SNNP** sites, circumcision was not practiced in two sites, but was important to cultural traditions in the three others. There were strong interventions with the Protestant church and NGOs active but some underground resistance. Among the eight **Oromia** sites interventions were no longer strongly enforced in five although there was covert or overt resistance in some. In contrast there were strong coordinated campaigns in three sites with considerable reduction despite some covert resistance.

- **Interventions** to eliminate FGC should **coordinate stakeholder involvement** and **integrate approaches** with community and customary leaders, parents, schools, health extension workers, and especially girls as well as boys.
- A **mix of approaches** may be **more effective** and a focus on **persuasion** rather than coercion may **avoid the practice going underground**.

### Sexual initiation

**Pre-marital sex** was culturally acceptable in only one site (Luqa), where **pre-marital pregnancy** and **birth-giving was taboo** and the child had to be abandoned, a custom called *mingi* opposed particularly by churches and NGOs leading to its **decline**. Elsewhere there was **more tolerance of male than female pre-marital sex** and serious concerns that **losing their virginity** would affect girls’ **marriage prospects**, which was a reason for insisting on **abducted girls marrying their abductors**. Nonetheless, there was **evidence of pre-marital sex** for both teenage boys and girls in many sites, although there were **also teenagers** who **did not want** and **had not had pre-marital sex** for various reasons including shyness, wanting to concentrate on school, waiting to have a secure livelihood, or parents’ choice of partner, or due to religious prohibition, particularly by Protestant Churches in southern sites. There were also instances of adolescents first having **sex on their wedding night**.

**Reproductive health education** is provided **in schools** and **through HEWs**. **Contraception availability, types, access and use vary** considerable by site, though **easy access** especially for teenage girls was **rare** except in Shumsheha, and **HEWs** were often **unwilling** to provide contraception to unmarried women. Apparent **increase in premarital pregnancies** was noted in eight sites, and there was evidence of **abortions** in 13 sites, using traditional means including herbs, or overdoses of medicines, with **risks and cases of deaths reported**. There was variation as to whether **abortion** was available **within the health services** and there was mention of women who could afford it **going to towns** notably to **private clinics** (*DB06:maternity*). According to the Criminal Code of 2005 **abortion is illegal** except in cases of **rape** and girls who **unable to support a child** being either **physically or mentally unfit** to bring up the child.

- **Youth sexual health** should give more prominence to **contraception access**, support in cases of **pre-marital pregnancies**, and **child bearing**, involving young men and parents as well as young women.

- Given the evidence of **risky abortions**, especially by adolescents who were **unable to gain access to contraception**, the legal provisions should be reviewed to allow **special dispensation** for adolescents who are **unable to support a child** to have an abortion.
- **Alternatives** to early marriage through **education, training and employment** should be promoted.

**Forced abduction** was a **customary** way for a young man to get a wife when he was unwilling or unable to do so through accepted institutions, for example due to **poverty**. Abduction was said to have **declined in most sites** in part due to closer access to schools and water sources and threats of severe punishments leading to elders refusing to negotiate settlements. Though it was said to have **virtually disappeared in at least five sites**, it was still considered to be **serious risk in six other sites** with **evidence of a few recent cases**.

Interventions to **stop abduction** were backed by the **family law** and **penal code** with cases of **punishments** mentioned in several sites. However, **sentences** usually only fines were far **less than the law allowed** or were often **not pursued** by the administration and there was **pressure by elders to arrange marriages after abduction** and **court cases being dropped**

**‘Voluntary abduction’**, or **elopement**, referred to as **‘consensus’ marriage** seems to be on the **increase** recently in at least eight sites. In Oromo sites it was seen as one way of **avoiding bridewealth** payments particularly for **poor men**, and settlements afterwards were less costly; it was sometimes a way for a girl to **avoid a parentally arranged marriage**. However, officials and parents expressed concerns about voluntary abduction in four sites, suggesting it encouraged young girls to drop out of school or that girls would be persuaded into marriage by cheap gifts.

- In enforcing the law **forced abduction** should be distinguished from **‘voluntary abduction’** or **consensual marriage** which is sometimes a way for young couples to make their own choices and **avoid parentally imposed marriages** and **brideprice costs**.

### Work transitions

Work transitions included **establishing home-related work carriers** largely by young women, **income-generating and productive work strategies** by both men and women, and **gaining economic independence** from parental households involving the couple setting up their own household.

#### Establishing home-related work carriers

The customary division of labour assigns **most domestic and reproductive work** to **girls and women**. Girls from **poorer households** had **greater responsibilities** notably for care work. In a number of **drought prone sites** girls had to walk **long distances to fetch water**. **Domestic work** for girls often required them to **work after school** and at the **weekends**, and caring for siblings sometimes meant girls were **late for school**. Girls were involved in a **wide range of domestic work** including cleaning, cooking, washing clothes and child care and outside the house collecting wood, fetching water, going to the grinding mill and market. In most sites they were also involved in work on **family farms** notably during weeding and harvesting, and in petty **trading** especially in poorer households and **family businesses** in richer households, sometimes making and selling drinks with their mothers. The **expansion of grinding mills** was mentioned as **reducing work** for girls and young women grinding grain manually.

There was evidence of **minor changes in the gender division of labour** notably in the food secure sites. **Boys** were engaged in some **outdoor work** traditionally mainly carried out by girls such as collecting **wood** and fetching **water**, taking grain to the **mill** and **shopping**. Boys’ involvement in

**indoor work** was **less common** although there were cases of boys **washing clothes, cleaning the house and cooking**, and even assisting with making *areke*.

### Income-generating work strategies and productive roles

Boys and girls in many sites were increasingly involved mainly **from their early teens** in **income-generating** often combined with schooling, and **older children and youth** increasingly in **employment** with increasing pressures on children to juggle work in the home and for income with school (*DB05:education*). **Non-agricultural work** was becoming **more significant**, particularly in the sites with greater market integration and proximity to towns.

**Small business activities** carried out by **young men** included **trade** in grain, livestock, coffee, *chat*, production and sale of wood, straw and charcoal, selling clothing, medicines and insecticides, providing **transport** with carts and motorbikes, working as **brokers** in selling agricultural produce, shoe-shining and renting table tennis tables. In some cases **enterprising young men** with access to **capital** and/or **family support** engaged in **more lucrative businesses** such as setting up **grinding mills** or **shops** or **teashops and cafeterias**. Young men from **poorer households** often had less opportunities to engage in business activities due to **lack of capital** and the need to **support their families**.

**Employment** opportunities for young men **within sites were rare** and often involved **migration** to towns. A few found work in **government offices** or as **teachers** and **DAs**. There were opportunities for **wage labour** in road construction, water development, factory construction (e.g. a beer factory in Kormargefia, a flour factory in Oda Dawata). However, **informal sector work was more common** such as loading and unloading from trucks, as drivers' assistants and in house construction. Young men **from poorer households** were often under **greater pressure** to engage in **wage-labour** to earn income to support their families.

**Income-generation** activities **by young women** were mainly in **petty trade** particularly of grain, vegetables, fruits livestock especially poultry, cooked food, alcoholic drinks and coffee. In a few sites young women from **wealthier backgrounds** opened businesses such as **hairstyling**. Girls from **poorer households** were often under **greater pressure to generate income** through petty trade, producing and selling alcoholic drinks and engaging in wage-labour to support their families.

**Employment** opportunities for young women in the **formal sector were much less common**, though in **flower farms** young women were preferred to young men, and many in one site worked in a **coffee-washing** plant (Aze Debo'a). Wage labour and employment opportunities for women often involved **migrating** to local or regional towns, large cities or abroad, generally to work as domestic workers or in the service sector in bars or in construction work (see *DB09:mobility*).

- Options for **young women's productive roles** should be given more attention, including **access to credit**, their greater involvement in **youth and women's cooperatives**, and promotion **of business and enterprise**.

### Gaining economic independence

Economic independence was often related with **parents' economic status**, and **especially land holdings**. **Limited access to land** was recurrently mentioned as a **major challenge for young men** in all sites. Gaining access to land from parents was becoming more difficult with **decreasing land holdings**, leading to increasing **inter-generational tensions** and **sibling rivalries**.

**Young women's access to land** was largely limited to the **recent inclusion of wives' names in land certificates**. There were cases of divorced women gaining access to land on divorce, However, in

some were unable to obtain a fair share of the land due to **gender discrimination by elders** involved in divorce settlements and sometimes by the kebele administration and women living in their husband's community and lacking access to make labour.

For the few young people - far more often men than women - who continued with secondary school, **education** was an alternative route to attain economic independence **through employment**. However, since continued education often **required parental support**, this sometimes led to **delayed economic independence and marriage** and was more difficult for youth from poor households. The problem was compounded because many young men **could not find jobs** even after finishing school.

While **young men** attained their independence by **obtaining access to land or selling their labor**, young women's primary means was **through marriage**. However, **young women earned income** from nonfarm activities, petty trade, food and drink production and wage labour while living under their natal or their husband's household unless they were divorced. The **delay in achieving full economic independence** negatively **affected** both young men's and women's **readiness for marriage** and putting further pressure on young women to accept propositions from older men.

### Issues and interventions to promote youth work transitions

Issues concerning young men were primarily lack of access to land and un(der)employment. Control of scarce land by the older generation led to **intergenerational and sibling tensions**, as young men were no longer able to set up independent households as was culturally expected of them, and this sometimes led to **delaying marriage and household formation**, with young men and women working for the parental household or migrating. Lack of access to land was more severe for young men from **poor backgrounds**, who more often had to resort to sharecropping, wage labour or migration (*DB03:inequality; DB09:mobility*).

The inability of many young men who had benefitted from schooling to find jobs led to some **disillusionment with education**. In a few sites some community members suggested that educated young men **no longer wanted to engage in farming**. Limited opportunities for youth locally also led to concerns expressed by some community members in a few sites about young men "**sitting idle**" or becoming engaged in "**bad habits**", including addiction to alcohol or *chat*, theft or violence.

**Youth cooperatives** were promoted in many sites. However, in several sites cooperatives were not very active or disbanded, and in some the land they were allocated was taken back by the Kebele and allocated to investors. Youth cooperatives were set up for a **range of activities** including farming, notably involving irrigation, loading and unloading agricultural produce, livestock fattening and trade sand extraction and stone crushing, forest and hillside conservation and development, incense and honey production. In a few sites co-operatives were **set up in local towns** for teashops and cafeterias, for shops, trading, handicrafts and metalwork and woodwork and house construction.

There were **tensions** in some sites between **youth wanting to obtain communal land for farming** and the **older generation** wishing to **protect communal grazing land**, and skepticism that youth cooperatives would not use land effectively. Many of the **agricultural cooperatives** were not **successful** and some shifted their activities. However, some **irrigation cooperatives fared better**. The **most successful** cooperatives were in **sand and stone extraction** and cobble stone production in small towns.

There was a **range of problems** associated with youth cooperatives, including issues to do with **management, leadership, competition** from unlicensed individuals, **market potential** and integration. The government sometimes provided **training, loans for equipment** such as pumps and



credit, though **repayment of loans was often a problem**, and lack or delay of repayments affected the potential to establish new cooperatives. In some sites there were **complaints** that the government was not helping youth to organize themselves in cooperatives and young women complained in some sites about not being included. **Women's involvement in youth cooperatives was minimal** and there were no cooperatives exclusively for young women although some young women were involved in women's cooperatives sponsored by NGOs and were able to obtain credit (*DB07:women*).

- **Micro and Small Scale Enterprises** should be expanded through small towns and *kebele* centres to rural areas, and **individual and group entrepreneurship** of young men and young women should be promoted.
- The relative success of **non-agricultural cooperatives in rural areas** should be replicated and expanded.
- Promoting greater involvement of **youth groups in economic activities** and **support to women's participation** could enhance **the role of youth in community affairs**.

### Family-related transitions

Among the three family transitions we **focus on getting married** as the area that has been the subject of most interventions and greater policy interest. Establishing **independent households** - largely covered in work transitions - **has become more constrained** due to land shortage, dependence on the parental generation, longer involvement in education and the lack of employment opportunities. The issue of having children is dealt with in another brief (*DB06:maternity*).

#### Child and early marriage and partner choice

**Customary marriage repertoires** varied by culture, including ethnicity, sub-regional and localized cultural practices and religious ideologies. Marriage for girls in **middle to late adolescence** was **customary throughout Ethiopia**, except in some parts of SNNP, but **pre-teen and early adolescent** marriage was **much rarer except in Amhara**, where there was also a custom of **promissory marriages** in childhood. However, not all households and/or children decided on early marriage, and there were differences within communities. There were **patterns of early marriage** associated with **wealth** in some contexts and **poverty** in others; in additions early marriage was sometimes linked to **dropping out of school** which may also be related to poverty (*DB05:education*). Another factor was **remoteness** and ability to evade the ban on early marriage. Finally, some girls and boys decided they **wanted to marry early**, either with parental endorsement or in defiance of parental interests, sometimes by eloping.

Customarily marriages were **arranged by the parents**, with **mediation of elders** generally not involving the young spouses in the decision-making. **Interventions** to raise the age of marriage to 18 were implemented through the **Family Code** and the **Criminal Code** with severe penalties added in 2005, which **criminalised early marriage and abduction**.

**Rationales** for early marriage related mainly to **risks facing girls** not getting married, including abduction, pre-marital sex, losing virginity, early pregnancies, abortion and raising children out of wedlock. Girls and boys have been **interacting earlier in the context of schools**, and parents fear they would have pre-marital sex, get pregnant and 'into trouble' leading them to 'become a burden', and be at risk of early exposure to STDs. There were **concerns** that girls involved in pre-marital sex **would not find suitable partners** and become **too old to marry**, and some girls **dropping out of school** with nothing to do often **wanted to marry early**.

In most sites there is **evidence of some reduction** in the extent of early marriage, due to a **range of factors** including **implementation of the law**, parents' and children's **education, work and migration aspirations**, broader **shifts in agency of girls** and the younger generation, and **economic problems** associated with **land shortage, lack of employment** opportunities, increasing **living costs** and **difficulties** for the youth to **establish independent livelihoods**. **Concerns** about early marriage without a secure economic base, and the risk that this **may lead to an early divorce** were expressed in several sites.

Despite reduction in early marriage, there is also widespread suggestions in many sites that **early marriage still continues** and community **resistance** as many parents felt that older adolescent girls were sufficiently mature to marry. Early marriage was also **often initiated by the younger generation**, with young women and men making their own decisions. **In three sites** there was even the suggestion by some that **early marriage was increasing**.

**Interventions to try to stop early marriage** ranged from **awareness training** by the Women and Children's Affairs Offices and **teachings in schools** through girls clubs and in some cases 'virgins' clubs sometimes with the **involvement of the HEW**, through **medical checks of girls** to ascertain their age, to **taking parents and elders** involved in marriage negotiations **to court** and even **imprisonment**. The **extent** of the interventions depends on a number of factors including **regional policy** and directives, the **perceived seriousness** of the problem, and the **period** when the research was undertaken.

In almost all sites interventions were carried out by **the government**, though in two sites **NGOs** were involved in **trainings** especially in schools (Gelcha, Somodo), and in one site the wereda plans to involve **trusted customary organisations** (Gara Godo). **Regional variations** were important. In Tigray the issue was said to have been resolved in one site (Geblen), but was still a problem in another (Harresaw). In Amhara early marriage was considered a serious problem and interventions in some sites were harsh involving threats and cases of punishments of elders and parents. In Oromia the question of abduction and FGC, which was also a major concern in SNNP, were the HTPs that were prioritized and early marriage was seen as less serious.

In practice in most sites **interventions have been limited to awareness raising** and local officials often did not want to create conflict by imposing the ban, and argued that if both parents and the girl agreed there was little that could be done; there were allegations of witnesses fearing to appear in court and even corruption of officers in one site; however, **legal measures** were taken in six sites **involving women's affairs, teachers, police and courts cases** (Two in Amhara, one in Tigray, and three in Oromia). **Age checks** of girls were mentioned in three sites (in Amhara and Tigray), and in one stamps were put on girls' arms to prove that they were overage. In one case the mother of a 13 year old girl was sent to prison for a year and father for three years (Shumsheha).

- Given uncertainties over girls' ages the lack of **birth certificates** is arguably the one **underlying problem** that needs to be addressed.

**Resistance** to the ban involved public acceptance but **secret practice**, claiming girls were older, holding a wedding under the guise of another ceremony, or during the rainy season to avoid interference by teachers, and, where checks were instituted, sending older sisters. In one site some arranged early marriages were still negotiated but the marriages were concluded when the children reached 18 (Yetmen).

Although much of the policy discourse and concern centres around age of marriage, arguably a more fundamental question is the **decision-making** around **choice of marriage partner**, and the fact that arranged marriages are **often enforced without the girl's consent**. The practice of brideprice

payments in the south made young men dependent on parental decisions, though with wage labour and migration young men often raised part of the money themselves.

However, there was a **marked change in marriage partner choices** with young men and even young women **more involved** in choosing their own partners, and the trend of **mutual consent** becoming **more common**. Even when marriages were arranged by parents it became normal in most sites for parents to consult daughters and gain their consent although girls came under a lot of pressure to assent. Increasingly though girls were **making their own choices** in many sites and their greater independence was promoted by their **involvement in wage labour and trade**. Couples making their **own decisions** was more common among **educated youth** and among those in **Protestant churches**. However, sometimes parents opposed their daughters' choice, even threatening to refuse to cover their schooling (Do'oma).

- Given the desire of some young couples to marry prior to the age of 18, as is common in a number of countries **special dispensation for 16-18 year olds to marry** could be envisaged with proper **oversight by responsible institutions** such as women's affairs offices and courts.

### Community transitions

There were less data on young peoples' **participation in social networks**, and their involvement in **youth organisations** and **community-initiated organisations** was **limited**, whereas there were signs in many sites that youth **participation in religion was increasing**. Some youth, particularly wealthier young men were involved in **saving through *iqub* savings associations**

Distinctions between the three youth organisations: **youth associations, leagues and federations** were sometimes unclear with overlapping leaderships. Youth associations have been around longer but many youth did not participate. The **size** of youth organisation membership **varied considerably**, and in a few sites these were not active or even non-existent.

Many youth were **disillusioned** with youth associations for **not providing economic opportunities** and associations were **constrained by lack of credit, training and limited support** from *weredas*. **Youth leagues** were closely linked to the EPRDF and **federations** often had smaller memberships that acted as leadership coordinating mainly political activities of youth leagues and associations.

**Young women's involvement** in youth organisations was **very limited**, and they were far **outnumbered by young men** and **under-represented in leadership** positions. In some sites young women **preferred to join women's associations** that were more active and had better resources, though often women's associations involved predominantly married women.

In contrast to limited involvement in associations, youth were **more involved in religious activities**. Youth were particularly encouraged to join Protestant Churches and played a role in the congregations, though there was also more youth participation in Orthodox Church events such as Sunday schools, and in Muslim communities, for instance with youth contributing to mosque constructions in some sites.

**Youth involvement in community affairs** was said to be limited in part since landless youth had less interest in community activities, such as conservation work on land of farmers and since **decision-making involved household heads**. However, some young men were involved in *kebele* leadership and development committees, and others in public works and volunteer work, such as repairing roads and cleaning springs, and a few joined the militia.

**Young women’s involvement** was said to be further **constrained by their domestic roles**, gender discrimination and lack of interest and encouragement. Young women’s involvement was much more limited than that of young men, though exceptionally **a few had positions or jobs** as health promoters, Health Extension Workers, Development Agents or teachers.

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