Yes I Do. Ethiopia – Amhara Region

The situation of child marriage in Qewet and Bahir Dar Zurida: a focus on gender roles, parenting and young people's future perspectives

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Abbreviations

Amref	African Medical and Research Foundation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
IDI	In-depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
KIT	KIT Royal Tropical Institute
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health

1. Introduction

This report presents a qualitative study conducted as part of the research component of the Yes I Do programme in Ethiopia, which is being implemented in the Amhara region from 2016 until 2020. This introduction starts with a brief background of the Yes I Do programme and the objectives of the research component, after which the focus of this qualitative study, including how and why the themes addressed were selected, is presented.

1.1 Background of the Yes I Do programme

In 2016, the Yes I Do Alliance, consisting of Plan, Amref, Choice for Youth and Sexuality, Rutgers and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), started a programme that aims to address child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in seven countries[1] by applying a mix of context specific intervention strategies. These strategies are based on a theory of change that was adapted to every country and which has five main strategic goals:

1) Community members and gatekeepers have changed attitudes and take action to prevent child marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM/C
2) Young women and men are meaningfully engaged to claim their sexual and reproductive rights
3) Young women and men take informed action on their sexual health
4) Young women have alternatives beyond child marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM/C through education and economic empowerment
5) Policy makers and duty bearers develop and implement laws and policies on child marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM/C

Within the Yes I Do Alliance, KIT is responsible for the research component. The research taking place alongside the five-year Yes I Do programme aims to test the underlying assumptions of the programme's theory of change, to measure the effectiveness of the interventions introduced by the programme and to contribute to optimization of the Yes I Do intervention strategies by providing context specific insights. The research has two main components: a broad mixed methods base-, mid- and end-line study in each country and an (operational) research component which is aimed at covering more specific research questions related to the interventions introduced by the Alliance in each country.

1.2 Process of identifying themes for this study

The identification of themes to be looked into in this study was done through discussions between the research team and representatives of the implementing partners in Ethiopia. These discussions were built on the main findings of the baseline study as well as the insights from programme implementation. In March 2017, baseline findings were discussed in a workshop, where participants discussed about the social practices and norms influencing young people's sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Issues around these social practices and norms were agreed to be relevant for the programme, needing more in-depth understanding. Following up on these discussions, in May 2017, the Ethiopia Yes I Do Alliance and KIT (at a distance) critically reflected on the presented issues during a meeting that was aimed at identifying themes

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[1] Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan and Zambia.

for the research to be conducted in 2017. The meeting included an interactive exercise, through which two rounds of prioritisation took place. The prioritization was done based on the following criteria: relevance, avoiding duplication, urgency, contextual acceptability, feasibility, applicability, and ethical acceptability. First, the following themes were identified:

- Influence of employment and (secondary) education opportunities on the interplay between social norms on (early) marriage and investment in girls education
- Social norms underlying the practice of 'wife in training'
- Resistance to policies and laws from community or from men and boys towards women and girl empowerment and rights
- Continuing underground FGM/C practice and ghost weddings
- Gap between anti-child marriage and FGM/C laws and law enforcement bodies
- Roles of religion in child marriage
- Influence of student peers in protecting girls from child marriage
- Influence and (potential) power of positive role models
- Influence of nature of family, relatives and community support
- Child marriage as a cause of teenage pregnancy

From this list, the first three themes were the ones prioritized by the participants during the meeting. The research team, based on the availability of data and complementarity with other studies, focused on the first and second of these three themes.

1.3 Social and gender norms related to child marrige

The baseline study clearly evidenced that the perceptions of what defines a 'good' wife, husband, male or female were central, thereby influencing the practice of child marriage as well as young people's attitudes, behaviour and agency. These perceptions were based on long established gender arrangements and rooted social norms. Gender norms and inequalities, based on unequal gender status and power relations together with stereotypical views of women´s roles and sexuality, have been widely highlighted as core drivers and structural causes of child marriage (Flavia P., 2014, Parsons et al. 2015). These gender norms not only define the status and role of women in relation to men but also outline when, with whom and under what circumstances marriage is considered as appropriate in a particular setting. However, social and gender arrangements are not fixed but are constantly changing (Connell, 2002; Connell, 2011).

The Overseas Development Institute - ODI (2015), based on programming and research around gender norms affecting adolescent girls – including child marriage in Ethiopia – developed a conceptual framework detailing what drives change in social and gender norms (Figure 1). This model highlights three main groups of influential factors: 1) changes in broader social, economic, political and demographic processes, 2) individuals factors influencing the adoption (or not) or new attitudes and behaviour, e.g. agency, families or role models, and 3) transmission mechanisms like media, mouth to mouth or leaders. All this factors influence when and how gender norms change, whether it occurs rapidly or slowly, perceived or unperceived, and whether it turns into 'positive' or ' negative' changes. In relation to child marriage, it could be argued that these factors influence whether the practice changes rapidly or slowly and whether the practice is reinforced or eliminated. While our study does not aim to focus on the identification of

changes in gender norms, the framework shows the importance of the interconnections between gender and social norms, broad economic and education factors, and individual and family factors like parenting or intergenerational communication. These interconnections can be explored in relation to the practice of child marriage.
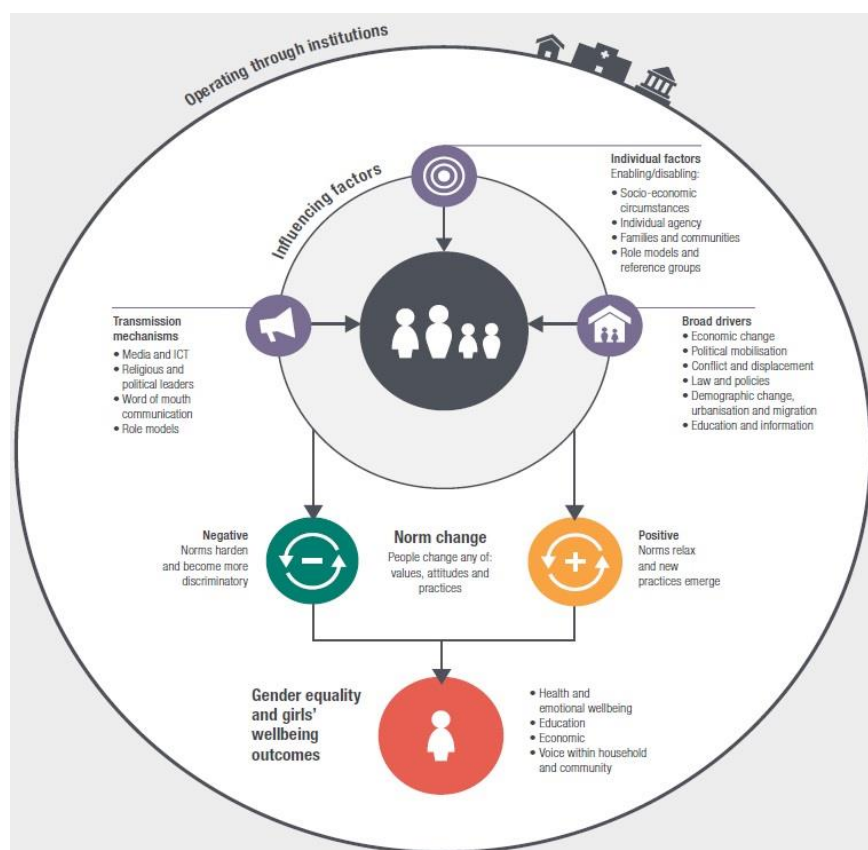
Figure 1. Conceptual framework on drivers of change in social and gender norms

In relation to broad drivers, recent research and programming on child marriage in Ethiopia show the influence of education, migration dynamics, communication and political mobilization in perceptions around (child) marriage and gender norms (ODI 2015). Based on the fieldwork experienced from a 4-years programme on 'Transforming the Lives of Adolescents Girls', ODI (2015) highlights that for economic reasons, some young men in Ethiopia wanted to marry educated young women who could also bring income into the household. Health messaging about the negative consequences of fistula had made some young people change their thoughts about the ideal age of marriage. The support of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the government's position on the minimum age of marriage led to changes in some people's perceptions on child marriage. Experiences of migration were challenging traditional gender roles.

Jones et al. (2018), based on a research in the Amhara region over three years, argue that child marriage and arranged marriage are decreasing, girl's education is becoming more common, and girls and young women's access to contraception and divorce is improving. At the same time, the authors highlight that norms around the importance of young women's sexual purity and unpaid domestic workload limit their future perspectives. As Svanemyr et al. (2015) argue, all these complex interrelations require further and

constant research, particularly in relation to evolving social, political and economic processes such as migration, changes in education or in employment opportunities.

The Yes I Do baseline study evidences that in both Qewet and Bahir Dar, parents and the wider family, play a central role in the practice of child marriage: they seem to be the major actors reinforcing the practice. There are numerous studies arguing that girls and young women have little or no voice in the decision to marry and therefore programmes on child marriage, including Yes I Do, include a focus on girls and young women's empowerment (Mc Dougal et al., 2018; Lee-Rife, S. 2012). However, there is also increasing evidence showing that girls and young women can also influence decision making on marriage and more research is required to better understand these decision making processes (Warner et al., 2014). A study by McDougal et al. (2018) in Ethiopia reveals that while elders were largely influencing the decision making related to early marriages, girls and young women also had input in the negotiation as well as in the final decision making steps of the process.

Besides the central role of the family and parents, the Yes I Do baseline study also clearly shows that relationships between young people and elders, especially parents, as well as between young people and authority figures such as traditional and religious leaders were characterized by an intergenerational gap in terms of communication. From the literature, little is known about parental engagement in sexual and reproductive health of young people in Ethiopia. The few studies about it have shown that there is limited parent-adolescent communication on SRH in Ethiopia (Dessalegn, 2012). Some elements that contribute to communication are parent's knowledge about SRH, parenting types and the age of adolescents (Dessie et al., 2015). Studies have also shown that SRH communication was associated with greater contraceptive awareness and increased condom use during the first sex (Ayalew et al. 2014, Feleke et al. 2013). Unpacking the perceived gaps, especially regarding values, beliefs, and attitudes between young people and their parents or grandparents is important in developing effective Yes I Do intervention strategies.

Following the above, it is important to gain more insight into the proposed theme for the study: the interplay between social and gender norms and their influence on child marriage, including the socio-economic and education opportunities and their relations with child marriage in Bahir Dar and Qewet. This includes young people's future perspective within the current social and economic trends (education and employment opportunities), and parenting and intergenerational communication. The study also pays attention to the existence of different meanings and forms of 'marriage', what constitutes a marriage what types there are and what community members define as an early marriage.

1.4 Objective of the study

Main objective

To explore the interplay between social and gender norms with young people's economic and education opportunities and the implications on the practice of child marriage in Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet woredas (districts), in Amhara national regional state.

Specific objectives

- To explore social and gender norms influencing family dynamics and decision making around marriage

- To examine young people's economic and education opportunities and their possible relationships with child marriage
- To relate young people's future perspectives with (lack of) changes in social and gender norms and (lack of) changes in the practice of child marriage

2. Methodology

The study was qualitative and focused on the Yes I Do intervention areas, namely Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet woredas. The study was conducted in the same kebeles (villages) included in the baseline study: four in each woreda. After describing the study areas, this section details the methods used, the data collection process including the selection and recruitment of participants, the data analysis, measures taken for quality assurance and ethical considerations.

2.1 Description of the study areas

2.1.1 Qewet woreda, North Shewa zone

Qewet woreda with Shewa Robit town as its capital, is located in the North Shewa zone of the Amhara national regional state. According to the 2007 Census, Qewet woreda has a population of 118,381 (Table 1). The Amhara are the main ethnic group (96%) followed by the Afar (3%) and Argoba (1%). In terms of religion, 83% of the population are orthodox Christian, 13% Muslim and 2% protestant. The agro-ecology of the woreda is characterized by lowland (56%), midland (23%) and highland (21%) with and altitude extending from 1500 to 2500 meters above sea level. The average temperature is 29^0C with an average of 600 mm of annual rainfall. The woreda is prone to frequent rainfall shortages characterized by late start or early cessation of the main rain season (June-August), though a significant part of the area also receives small rains during January to March. Qewet woreda consist of 18 kebeles and this study was conducted in four of them, namely Yelen, Abayatir, Sefiberet and Medina.

The population in these four kebeles are mainly dependent on crop-cum-livestock farming, sometimes providing casual employment opportunities for the youth. Migration to Arab countries is another source of income in the form of remittance for residents. This has encouraged illegal outmigration with potential health, physical and psychological risks for young women and girls who aspire to migrate to improve their socio-economic conditions. Sometimes, the pressure for migration comes from parents who are keen to receive remittances following their daughters' migration. Amref Ethiopia and Women Support Association work in the area to improve SRH services and provide income generating activities for women and young people. Plan International Ethiopia supports young people to engage in income-generating activities, such as food preparation, garment and hairdressing.

Table 1. Area, population and livelihood features of the study woredas

Key features	Bahirdar Zuria woreda	Qewet woreda
Area (km$^{2)}$	1143.37	785.85
GPS coordinates	$11^014^{\shortmid}60.00$ N $37^009^{\shortmid}60.00$ E	$10^009^{\shortmid}60.00$ N $39^044^{\shortmid}59.99$ E
Population	182,730	118,381
Pop density	126.60	150.64
No of HHs	40,893	29,058
HH size	4.47	4.07
Major social organizations	Orthodox Christianity	Orthodox Christianity, Moslim and Protestant

Livelihood	Crop-cum-livestock farming (major crops: maize, teff, khat and fruit crops of mango,	Crop-cum-livestock farming (major crops: maize, teff, sorghum, tomato, khat)
Economic opportunities	High irrigation potential using Andasa Dams and Abbay River	Small-scale irrigation using river diversions, dairy potential, international migration, etc.

2.1.2 Bahir Dar Zuria woreda, west Gojjam zone

Bahir Dar Zuria woreda is located in West Gojjam zone of the Amhara national regional state. The woreda surrounds Bahir Dar city – capital of the state – and has a population of 182,730 people. The population's main livelihood is farming where maize, finger millet and teff are produced. Khat has also become a major source of livelihood especially for young people who are routinely engaged in contractual khat farming by taking khat plots from farmers and harvesting green leaves for a fixed amount. The crop has increasingly become an important cash source, mostly displacing crop fields. Young people are seen working on khat fields and are transporting khat to local selling points on the Bahirdar-Gondar main asphalted road. Young people migrate to Humera, Awi zone and neighbouring areas of the Oromiya region (e.g. Wollega) in search of jobs. The study was conducted in the four baseline kebeles of Robit, Chencha Sostu, Leta Amba and Yigoma Huletu.

Most residents of these kebeles are dependent on agriculture where crop production is the primary source of income, supplemented by cattle, sheep and small-scale poultry farming. Khat farming, flower farms and production of fruits provide employment opportunities for the youth in Robit, but in Chenta Sosetu, young people have very limited economic opportunities and therefore migrate to Bahir Dar to work on construction and other casual jobs (e.g. daily labourer). In Yigoma Huletu kebele, people cultivate crops using Andasa I and Andasa II irrigation dams built to provide all-year-round irigation water. Young people are engaged in these activities by renting land from other farmers, but shortage of land is a constraint. The Andasa livestock center and Agre milk production farm are two important economic organizations in the area that provide, though in a limited way, employment opportunities.

2.2 Methods

The study used three methods: in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). All the interviews and FGDs focussed on family structure, intergenerational communication, decision making around child marriage, young people's economic opportunities, the value of education particularly for girls and young women, gender roles and norms and perceptions around child marriage. The IDIs and FGDs were conducted with young women and young men between 15 and 24 years, mainly unmarried with a few married participants in some FGDs. KIIs were held with parents/grandparents, religious leaders, community leaders, kebele officials, teachers and health professionals. Table 2 specifies the number of IDIs, FGDs and KIIs by woreda.

Table 2. Research methods and number of study participants by study site

	Target population	Bahir Dar Zuria	Qewet	Total
IDIs	Young women	4	4	8
	Young men	3	4	7
FGDs	Young women	4	4	8
	Young men	4	4	8
KIIs	Teachers	1	2	3
	Health worker	1	1	2
	Police officer	-	1	1
	Religious leader	1	1	2
	Women affairs	1	1	2
	Kebele chair	-	2	2
TOTAL number of interviews/ FGDs		19	24	43

2.3 Study participants and data collection

Study participants were selected purposively and recruited with the support of local guides, namely women and children affairs officers and members of youth and women's associations. The selection of young women and men for the IDIs and FGDs used the criteria of education and marital status to ensure variation: both in- and out-of-school as well as married and unmarried young people, females and males, were selected. Key informants – teachers, health workers, religious leaders, parents, community leaders, kebele chairpersons and police – were selected based on their position and assumption that they had knowledge about the themes under study.

The fieldwork took place between February and March 2018 by a small team of four research assistants, two in Qewet and two in Bahir Dar. All research assistants had participated in the research workshop and data collection of the baseline study, and received capacity building on qualitative methods and ethical considerations in research.

2.4 Data analysis

A combination of an inductive approach (identifying emerging themes through coding and labelling qualitative data) and a deductive approach (using pre-existing themes based on the literature) was followed. Transcripts were read, coded in Nvivo and common themes and sub-themes were identified by the research team. Preliminary findings were presented in the mid-term review workshop with Yes I Do Alliance staff, in September 2018. A final data analysis workshop took place in Addis Ababa in November 2018, where the results were structured and narratives on the main themes were written and peer-reviewed. The national researcher, two research assistants and two KIT staff participated in the workshop.

2.5 Ethical considerations

This qualitative study was an extension of the baseline study, conducted in the same areas and with the Yes I Do theory of change of Ethiopia as the basis. Therefore, the study was covered by the research proposal submitted and approved before the start of the baseline study by the Ethical Review Committee of the Amhara Regional State Health as well as by KIT's Ethical Review Committee.

The study followed the ethical principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy and justice. Informed consent was asked verbally of all participants, and they were informed that they could refuse to answer questions and could stop the interview without any repercussions. All interviews were held in a safe and comfortable environment, for participants to express themselves freely. To ensure anonymity, only the research team has access to the data and identifiers were removed from the transcripts. The research team included male and female researchers who spoke the language of the study area.

3. Results

The main results of the study are organized as follows. First, the main findings on gender roles, decision making and intergenerational communication within the family are presented. Second, the meaning and types of marriage identified, including divorce, are discussed. Third, young people's future perspective in both woredas, based on economic opportunities and the value of education, are presented. In all sections, references on the relation with the practice of child marriage are presented.

3.1 Gender roles, decision making and communication within the family

Gender was a central factor determining the division of roles and responsibilities within families. Females were said to have double workload: they are responsible for all domestic tasks while they also participate in economic activities. In both woredas, parents were found to often exercise an authoritarian parenting style, especially towards daughters. At the same time, advise from parents and discussions between parents and their children took place, although contextual factors as well as the difference in education levels posed challenges to their communication and relationships.

3.1.1 Gender roles within the family

The study shows the existence of a gender-based division of roles and tasks within the family. Only young women were involved with domestic tasks such as cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, caring and nurturing their younger siblings. Some young men argued that girls' and women´s roles and life was more limited to the private-home sphere partly because of parents' control and protection. As the quote below illustrates, the control and protection from the parents is related to the fear that their daughters would spend time with young men and eventually engage in premarital sex. Participants argued that some parents did not even allow their daughters to go to the market by themselves without being accompanied by mothers or elder brothers.

> *"Most of the time females are disciplined by working on indoor activities; the more parents consider their daughter is rude[2], the less they allow her to undertake outdoor activities. She is rarely allowed to visit the market as she is suspected to meet her hidden friend. Limited peer contact is considered as punishment. I do not think keeping girls at home save them from being rude. This pressure can even lead to another deviant behaviour which will undermine family prestige."* (FGD young men, Yelen kebele)

However, young women in the studied areas had multiple roles in the family which were not only limited to the domestic tasks. The study found that it was common for young women to work outside the house to support the family through economic activities such as farming. In Bahir Dar, there were multiple examples of young women working on the flower farms to earn cash income for themselves and for the family. Almost all participants reported that young women generally supported their parents more than young men who tended to spend more time for themselves. As the following quote suggests, this seems to be influenced by the more limited employment and economic opportunities for young women compared

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[2] Participants referred to young women being 'rude' if they were (somehow) involved with young males/ boyfriends.

to young men. In Robit Kebele, for instance, young men had a bigger chance to be recruited to work on Khat farms (such as watering, collection and selling Khat) than young women.

> *"Nowadays, young women are working in home and out of home, unlike young men working only out of home. Actually, unlike young men, we young women don't have any place to go except assisting our parents."* (FGD young women, Chenta Sosetu kebele)

Moreover, participants accounts show that young women had less free time and less agency than young men for various reasons. Young men participating in an FGD in Medina kebele reported that they were not pushed to support parents as compared to young women. Participants referred to social norms, specifying that it was conventionally okay for young men to have friends and to hang out with them while this same privilege was not extended to females. During an FGD with young men in Robit kebele, other participants revealed that young men were often able to influence the decision of parents and therefore were more able to push for their interests such as playing and visiting friends. For instance, after school time, young men indicated that they were not as forced by parents to execute assigned tasks as young women were. A female who participated in an FGD in Latamba kebele further described the difference in expectations on the basis of gender:

> *"Young males may leave home to meet their friends and return at night even without informing their parents about their whereabouts. No one asks them where they have been. If so, the boy can tell his parents and convince them. Parents also accept because it is normal for boys to stay outside home. The same, however, is very serious for girls. Females have no option to leave home without concrete reasons such as education. If a girl leaves home without the permission, it assumed that she has a boyfriend to contact. This makes her rude in the eyes of parents. Even the time to and from school is inspected by parents. Our brothers, after school, have their meal and immediately leave home whether they have their own business or not. This is just normal."* (FGD young women, Latamba kebele)

Other participants discussed that age was an influencing factor on males' roles and responsibilities within the family. After adolescence young males were less likely to support their parents as they more commonly started their own businesses compared to females. Moreover, key informants from Chenta Sosetu kebele observed that when males became around 20 years, fathers often donated them a parcel of farmland to start their own farming activities, while females often supported their parents until they married and left their parents' home.

Some key informants also argued that increasing modernization and urbanization was making young men spend more time in towns than supporting their parents, especially those moving to rooms in towns to continue with secondary education. While young women attending secondary school in towns were expected to support their parents during breaks, holidays or weekends, young men were not expected to do the same and could spend their time to enjoy urban life.

Summing up, the study findings indicate that gender determines young people's roles and responsibilities within the family. Domestic tasks were done only by (young) women who at the same time contributed to income generating activities for the household. Young men were only involved with income generating activities and more often for themselves rather than for the family.

3.1.2 Power and decision making in the family

Power and decision making in the family was shaped by the gender roles and norms as discussed in the above section. Participants' narratives show a variety of perceptions in relation to power and decision making within the family. However, it was clear that males, particularly fathers, generally had more power within the family than mothers. Traditionally, fathers were identified as the head of the family and therefore as the one making most decisions. A few female participants in Yigoma Huletu and Sefiberet kebele also stated that females were expected to be obedient while males were entitled to manage almost all family affairs.

However, in most cases, the study participants also acknowledged the responsibilities and power of mothers. Although fathers had the final say, mothers participated and influenced decision making processes on multiple topics such as education or household management. Other participants differentiated the decision making power of mothers by domains and stated that in relation to household management, mothers had the final say. This could also include the management of sales income to cover household expenses. For issues such as children's education, land management or marriage, decisions relied on men. In the words of key informant:

> *"Culturally male is head of home, he exercises more power. Traditionally, yes, males' dominance is much more than female's; he decides many things in home. But in the home [on household matters] mothers exercise more power."* (KII, Chenta Sosestu kebele)

Although less frequently, some participants argued that both mothers and fathers had equal power within the family and some reported this as a change. These participants stated that the decisions within families were based on discussions and negotiations between both parents as equals. As one of the quotes below suggests, this equal power of mothers and fathers seemed to be a more recent situation.

> *"Both fathers and mothers exercise the power equally and they lead the family together with discussion."* (FGD young women Robit Kebele)

> *"Compared with the previous, presently it is much improved, we decide things just in negotiation and discussion. Indeed, previously no man could provide credit to women in order to participate in any decision making activities. However, at present women's life is highly improved thanks to God! No visible difference between us and them, except some activities which are usually assigned to men like ploughing, collection of production from farm etc.*" (FGD young women, Robit kebele)

A few participants stated that mothers were the head of the family. These cases could be linked to the structure of the family, for example weather it was a single mother or the father was very old. However, the study also found a few cases in which mothers were reported by young people as being the ones exercising greater power than fathers.

> *"It varies from family to family, in some families mothers exercise more power and in others fathers exercise more power. In the case of my family my mother exercises more power than my father. Even if my father works, he doesn't worry and can´t manage the income and expenditure of the home, whereas my mother is better than him."* (IDI young woman, Robit Kebele)

Summing up, while fathers were generally reported as playing a leading role in decision making within families, participants also commonly acknowledged mothers' roles in influencing and even leading decisions within the family in some or various domains. In any case, what seemed to be clear is that the decision making processes relied on parents with limited or no engagement of children and youth.

> *"For instance, decisions regarding children education, marriage and residential place are exclusively decided by fathers. They rarely consult members of the family. It is assumed that fathers know the best for their family. Children have insignificant roles on holding power. Even when elders discuss at home while having coffee, children are ordered to leave the house and look after the cow. You cannot imagine the urban way of life where all members of the family have a say on their life."* (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

3.1.3 Relationship between parents and children: parenting styles and communication

PARENTING STYLES

The prevailing parenting style in both woredas seemed to be authoritarian[3]. Interviewed parents justified the importance of strict parenting to make sure their children had good manners and were good people. Parents, in particular fathers, were assumed to know the best for their children and therefore, transparency between parents and children was reported to be limited. Parents exercised strict control over their children and young people often reported they could not participate in adults' discussions. Young people had different perceptions on the control from parents: while some seemed to escape it through migration or even marriage, others referred to this control as positive. In the words of young man in Sefiberet Kebele:

> *"We consider the restriction of parents as good for our future growth and personality. I grow under close supervision and parents' control. I like that and I think all children in our community want that. Children are not allowed to engage in issues which parents discuss; they have to hear orders and implement. Good boys are good order receivers. Parents decide the best for their children and accepting what is said is important. I will marry based on the proposal and confirmation of my mother. I will not discourage her and make her feel ashamed by choosing a bad girl."* (IDI, young man, Sebiferet Kebele)

For many informants, parenting was not associated with individual decisions of certain families. It was more understood as a reflection of broader norms governing the relationship between children and parents. For instance, a female FGD participant from Chenta Sosetu kebele noted that authoritarian parenting gave parents prestige for 'cultivating polite children'. Especially for young women, being polite and growing up under strict control was identified as a positive characteristic to be chosen for marriage. Parental supervision appeared to be stricter for young women than for young men. Parents decided where and when their daughters could go including whether they could attend classes or not. As a 20-year-old young man from Abayatir stated:

> *"We all grow under strict supervision. For instance, I am student. My parents expect me to go to school and come back on time. I may have other needs but no one considers this. This supervision*

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[3] Note that the main question asked was 'What methods do parents use to discipline their children?', which already shows a more authoritarian way of thinking.

is more strict for girls than boys because they are highly required for household activities at home. I know my female classmates who are not allowed to attend tutor class since parents consider such supplementary activities as an opportunity for girls to become rude. We may ask our need related to recreation and leisure time. These are rarely considered by our parents." (FGD young men, Sefiberet Kebele)

A few parents opted for a permissive parenting style as stated by a young man from Yelen Kebele "*I can say may be only 1% of the community entertain open discussion with children and support democratic parenting."* Young men further explained that a permissive kind of parenting was conceptualized as urban culture, which was considered different and deviant. Similarly, young women interviewed in Chenta Sosetu argued that their parents did not want their children to adopt urban culture. Parenting was reported to be less strict in urban settings compared to rural areas.

"There is a significant difference between methods of discipline children in urban and rural areas. Life in rural is demanding. Parents do not want their children to go beyond their capacity and expectation." (FGD young men, Medina kebele)

Changes were reported with respect to parenting. Young people discussed that the use of corporal punishment by parents was less common than in the past and that parents more commonly provided advice to their children rather than direct punishment. Some argued that corporal punishment was not used at all anymore while others said that it was sometimes used but not as a first option.

"Nowadays parents use advise to proper manage their children, no one uses corporal punishment." (FGD young women, Latamba kebele)

"In my family, if our mistake is for the first and second or even for the third time we are advised, otherwise if our mistake is repeated we could be punished by corporal punishment." (FGD young women, Latamba kebele)

In addition to that, parent's authority over their children was said to decline when they started earning their own income, as they were more independent. This was more reported in Bahir Dar where young people had more access to job opportunities than in Qewet. Some participants also argued that authority from parents declined because some parents feared that otherwise their young children would leave home and go live independently.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Young people argued that communication between parents and children varied per family. While various participants reported that there were positive changes with discussion between parents and children becoming more common, communication seemed to be generally limited and influenced by contextual factors as well as by a strong intergenerational gap in education levels.

"There are significant changes in parenting style over time. In the past, the degree of rigidity was high to total authoritarianism. Gradually, I, myself, started to openly talk to my parents regarding my aspiration and life goals. Unlike in the past, nowadays there are good beginnings in consulting children about their aspiration. Pertinently, marriage is less likely to be imposed on children as compared to the past." (FGD young men, Yelen kebele)

"Anyways, the communication between parents and children with regard to different issues such as education and marriage can be considered as almost weak." (FGD, young women, Robit kebele)

Some young women and men involved in this study reiterated that their relationship with mothers was better than with fathers. They reported that mothers understood their needs (such as food, education and play) more than fathers. Moreover, a few participants stated that communication was more limited for young females than males. The most mentioned element influencing parent-children communication was the difference in education. Some participants argued that having a higher education level was allowing them to participate and influence discussions with their parents. However, others perceived that the difference in education was making mutual understanding more difficult because of different views and attitudes that were leading to conflict.

"In fact, some parents believe that their children know better than them as their children become educated and accept what their children say. On the contrary, some parents also want to be what they believe, this can also be the source of conflict. In general, it is difficult to have good relation between illiterates and the so called literates." (FGD young women, Robit kebele)

The communication conflict due to education difference between parents and children was further detailed as young people not taking their parents' advices seriously, parents feeling not valued or not respected, young people requiring more economic resources from parents as they advanced in education, and difference in core attitudes towards key topics such as marriage. As an example, during an interview in Latamba Kebele, a young woman expressed that she felt disappointed about the different perspectives and thoughts between herself and her parents which made her prefer to not enter into discussions.

"Our conversation and dialogue is not good, it is limited. Their illiteracy has great impact on our conversation. In our conversation the way they see and understand issues quite differ from my thoughts. Actually, as they don't hear me and can't agree up on dialogue even on my future, I prefer to keep quite silent. I am disappointed by them." (IDI young woman, Latamba kebele)

Other youth were critical towards the position of their peers with parents. During a FGD, young men discussed that youth should also adapt to their families and understand their parents better. As an example on child marriage, during an FGD, a young woman expressed disagreement with young women going to court to cancel arranged marriages arguing that through discussions with parents, these issues could be solved better.

"The relationship children have with their parents depends on how the latter treats their children. Mothers are most of the time easy to talk to while fathers are aggressive. Children are partly responsible for the deteriorating relationship as they reflect all they learned from peer interaction in their family. You do not have to apply all you learn at school in the family. In some situations, children fail to understand the pressure on parents." (FGD young men, Abayatir Kebele)

"For instance, parents need their children to have marriage and when they prepare the wedding ceremony, we children keep quiet without any complaint and finally we start to go to court taking the case as a disciplinary problem. But this is in my opinion absolutely wrong, since it is possible to resolve

the problem by discussion with family. During such occasion the relationship becomes quite worse".
(FGD young women, Robit Kebele)

3.2 Meaning and forms of (child) marriage

Related to the family dynamics described above, the study found different types of marriage based on who decided and why, which are presented below. Parents played a central role in arranging marriages, but also in approving marriage suggestions from young people themselves.

3.2.1 Meaning of marriage

In the study areas, marriage was predominantly conducted through traditional cultural customs rather than through a civil marriage. Orthodox Christians and Moslims also practiced religious marriage with a wedding ceremony attended by family members, relatives, neighbours and friends in which religious leaders gave the blessing of the marriage. The study revealed that marriage was a socially approved and legitimate means of establishing a family in both Qewet and Bahir Dar Zuria woredas. Therefore, marriage was very important for parents, young people and the wider community. A key informant from Qewet explained the meaning and value of marriage with the following words:

> *"Marriage is a respected value system in the community. It is important for the partners, the parents and the wider community. For partners, marriage is considered as a life success, which entertains once in their life. Specifically for females it is an institution and opportunity whereby they make their own family and get happiness from their children they may bear. For males too, it is a sign of independence and demonstrating freedom from family. He is no more a child; he is household head and thinks of his future. Marriage is a source of pride and prestige for parents. Since marriage establishes family through which a generation continues and kinship is expanded, marriage is a means of assuring future presence for parents. It has a meaning for relatives who are involved. For the society, marriage is about maintaining custom and identity. That is why forms of marriage, like child marriage, are difficult to change. Marriage has and is a social value."*

The importance of marriage seemed to create a stronger expectation towards females than males. Unmarried young women from a certain age were given the pejorative label of 'Kumoker' which created pressure on parents around young women's marriageability with age increase. However, some participants also argued that the social expectations and pressure around marriage were decreasing.

> *"The thinking that girls will not get after some age, mainly after 20, is also a main factor for child marriage. Kumaker is the labelling given to girls who did not get marriage at a time when parents and children consider ideal age of marriage. This attachment is negative for both the girls and parents. All parents compare their own daughter with others in the community who were married."*
> (KII, Qewet)

> *"The [pervious] belief that late marriage affects family prestige, brings unwanted pregnancy, affects social network, and self-esteem of the girl is not that much emphasized now."* (FGD young men, Medina Kebele)

In most marriages, local leaders and elders played a vital role mediating the negotiations between the parents of both future spouses. However, the decision making processes around marriage as well as the

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reasons for the marriage varied. Based on these elements, the study identified the main types of marriage as described below.

3.2.2 Types of marriage based on reasons and decision making

Arranged marriages, where parents choose who their son or daughter should marry, were common in both areas. At the same time, arranged marriages differed per case. In some cases, parent's arranged the marriage for both spouses, while in others, it was arranged more for the bride as the proposal came from the groom and went through both parents for negotiation before asking the consent of the young woman. The consent from the bride was sometimes unclear, making the distinction between forced and arranged marriage difficult. At the same time, the study shows that marriages led by young people were becoming more common although the approval from parents was often important.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE

In arranged marriages, usually the father of the young man sent respected elders from the community to the parents of the young woman to present a marriage proposal. During the visit to the future bride's parents, these elders describe the characteristics of the groom and detail the socio-economic background of his parents and family. The negotiation and preparation of the marriage was further arranged by parents, mainly fathers. Young women could remain uninformed during this process and only be informed about the marriage after the parents had reached an agreement, including on the wedding date. An interviewed young woman from Robit shared a case of a friend who had an arranged marriage.

> *"My friend married under an arranged marriage. No one told her she had been betrothed until the wedding day. Parents made the marriage proposal secret because if she had known, she would have left home. Until the day of wedding, she did not know the purpose of catering. Lastly she married while I continued my education."* (IDI young women, Robit Kebele)

From the study findings it is unclear whether there was always some form of consent from the bride's side in the marriages reported as arranged. On the one hand, some participants argued that young women accepted the proposals as a form of respect and agreement with fathers even if they had little or no information about the marriage and groom. In FGDs with young women it was discussed that especially when young women had some financial resources, parents rarely arranged a marriage without consulting their daughters when they received a marriage proposal. Key informants stated that because of a greater awareness of illegality of child marriage, parents more commonly sought for their daughters' content. On the other hand, others highlighted that fathers could take decisions within the family, including on marriage of their children, without consultation.

> *"In some situations, a girl may not have any information about the personality of her potential husband; everything is predetermined by the parents according to their need because parents are assumed to know the best for their children. The girl accepts the proposal for the sake of keeping the prestige of her parents. It is better for a girl to choose her friend at least but this is not the case for [many] girls as they are forced to comply with parents' choice."* (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

"Regarding marriage, no one exercises more power than the father does, as the father is assumed the head of that family. Fathers can allow or decline marriage. He can also arrange marriage to his best without or little consultation of other members of the family." (FGD young men Yelen)

As for the groom, the findings suggest that young men were more often aware about the marriage proposal. Moreover, in some cases, young men were the ones taking the initiative in proposing who they wanted to marry and then left it to their parents to arrange the marriage, with little involvement of the young woman. That was the case for an interviewed young man in Latamba kebele who shared that he selected the woman he wanted to marry and her parents accepted.

"I selected my own current wife, then I told to my father, then my father by being with other elder people went to her parents to ask them to give their daughter to me, since they knew me very well they were willing to give their daughter, then she became my wife." (IDI young man, Latamba kebele)

The main reasons for arranged marriages were related to the social value, functions and meaning of marriage. As marriage created a strong relationship between in-laws, establishing a close link with a respected or wealthier family was seen as a means to lessen household economic burdens and ensure a better economic situation for young women. Marriage was also a means to obtain new male workforce for the family or to have access to farmland through arrangements such as sharecropping. As marriage was central in family formation, avoiding premarital sex and pregnancy and the shame and loss of dignity attached to these were also highlighted as common reasons for arranged marriage.

"Child marriage is assumed to enable girls to be free from depending on parents. Parents arrange marriage in order to show their concern for the betterment of their girl. In an economically poor household, [arranged] marriage is an option for girls to escape poverty. Families push girls to reduce the mouths to feed. In addition to prestige of parents, it is also assumed good for girls themselves. The respect for married girls is higher than those who are not married. Those who have cancelled marriage have no social recognition of their peers and neighbourhood. She may lose virginity without marriage, which is insult for the parent!" (FGD young men, Sefiberet Kebele)

These reasons were more focused on females than males and were also used to explain child marriage, suggesting that child marriage was generally arranged. However, young women above the age of 18 could also have an arranged marriage. Although direct confrontation and opposition to parents' decision making around marriage seemed to not be common, the study found a few cases where young women declined or opposed to marry. Young women approached teachers and schools in cases of arranged marriages, who helped preventing the marriage by talking to parents or even cancelling an already celebrated marriage with the support of the police. One key informant also shared that in her personal case, she expressed her preference to continue with her education to her parent who supported her despite the pressure of the community and the marriage proposal of a young man's family.

"Child marriage is common in our kebele. I remember a girl who married last year while she was a student of grade 9. She married due to pressure from family and relatives. Her husband was economically good and able to convince her parents. She had no information prior to her marriage. When she got information of her marriage proposal, she reported the case to school. Then school

reported to police and cancelled the marriage, though parents abused teachers involved in the process." (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

"We are working with schools to avoid child marriage and FGM/C. We meet and discuss with the school girls club head, three teachers, health extension head and me at school every 15 days. For instance, recently we stopped one child marriage by calling her mother and [let her] sign to give up the process. Moreover, we have been meeting with students and advised to be aware of child marriage and FGM/C. Teachers also go to church and teach and advise students' parents." (FGD young women, Yigoma kebele)

Various participants argued that the practice of child and arranged marriage was more focused in remote areas and that in general, the practice was in decline.

"By parents arranged marriage is declining. The belief that late marriage affects family prestige, brings unwanted pregnancy, affects social network, and self-esteem of the girl is not that much emphasized now." (FGD young men, Medina Kebele)

LOVE MARRIAGE

The study findings suggest that not all marriages were arranged as young people often choose by themselves who they wanted to marry. Young people had their boyfriends and girlfriends and decided together that they wanted to marry and then informed their parents, sometimes for approval. One key informant argued that young women sometimes wanted to marry their boyfriends because otherwise it was more difficult to meet with their boyfriends and engage in sexual relations. Female and male participants also noted that some young women considered marriage as a way of claiming independence or as freedom from strict parental supervision and work burden. A teacher observed that love marriage was more the case among young people who are educated because school time allows them to frequently contact and establish love relationships.

"Some girls consider marriage as a way of freedom from heavy burden form parents. When asked by police, they mention that they hate their parents and rather want to have the life of their own than working for parents throughout their life." (FGD young men, Yelen kebele)

"There are girls who have boyfriends at school. These girls want to marry their boyfriend rather than those proposed by parents. The main reason for girls' interest to marry is their inability to control their sexual desire. Girls in this area are sexy and grow very fast. She cannot meet boys while she is with her parents. Therefore, the only escaping mechanism is marriage. Marriage fulfils her sexual desire." (KII, Qewet)

"Now young people decide their marriage partner and inform their parents. Then marriage takes place." (FGD young women, Yigoma kebele)

"Now marriage is not like before that was done based on only the interest of parents, rather I will agree with my boyfriend to have marriage then we let to know for our parents. No forced marriage." (FGD, young women Chenta kebele)

3.2.3. Divorce

Most participants in both woredas argued that child marriage was related to divorce. Different reasons for this link were detailed. As child marriage was generally arranged by the family, the bride and groom often did not know each other and therefore they were less likely to sustain their marriage. Immaturity and age difference between partners were commonly mentioned.

> *"Yes, child marriage results in divorce. For instance, from my marriage experience, I really hated my life because I was a kid at my first marriage. I returned to my home after some time in marriage. Yet, my parents sent to me back to him (husband, who was older than me) again several times. I did not love him. It not surprising thus that I refused to sleep with him until I divorced. Like me, many girls who engaged at early age immediately divorce. However, I don't hear FGM/C could be the cause for divorce."* (IDI, Girl, Robit kebele)

Other arguments on the relation between child marriage and divorce were difficulties to manage the household and sexual incompatibilities. These were more commonly attributed to young women, for not being able to properly lead household management and for not meeting sexual expectations of their older husbands.

> *"Child marriage contributes to high divorce rates in our community. Child girl has no any idea about household management and sexual affairs. After marriage, she fails to meet the expectations of the husband in both circumstances and divorce occurs. This however does not mean that all child marriages end in divorce. For some their first partner is their life."* (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

Some participants expressed that divorce was lower in arranged marriages. A key informant in Medina kebele affirmed that since young people fear their parents who arranged their marriage, they rarely divorce. Moreover, it was stressed that divorce was uncommon because of young women's limited chances to return to their parent's households with no other alternatives.

> *"If the girl is student, there will be a communication gap between the two. Divorce is not common in the area. I think girls remain in marriage, even when they are uncomfortable, because their chance[4] is limited if they come back to their parents."* (KII, Medina kebele)

There were others reasons for divorce reported that were not related to child marriage such as migration, moving to towns, economic difficulties or even changes in the value of marriage.

> *"The value of marriage is declining overtime. Thus, divorce becomes normal. Trust between partners depends on marital satisfaction. Child girls cannot satisfy this. This leads to divorce. Marriage for economic reason always ends in divorce."* (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

3.3 Young people's future perspectives: employment opportunities, migration trends and value of education

The study explored young people's life perspectives by asking participants about the value of education

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[4] 'Chance' referring to future perspectives, including new marriage.

and economic opportunities. In general, the main findings indicate that in both woredas, (limited) employment opportunities lead to increasing migration trends. At the same time, in a context of a general value of primary education for both young women and men, the economic context influenced young people's perceptions around the value of secondary education. Young people's life perspectives were found to be different in Qewet and Bahir Dar, depending on the particular socio-economic context of each woreda. Therefore, this section highlights the differences between Bahir Dar and Qewet by presenting the findings separately when needed.

3.3.1 Limited economic and employment opportunities and increasing migration flows

Employment opportunities were particularly limited in Qewet. In Bahir Dar, although limited, young people had more opportunities than in Qewet. While migration was reported to be increasing in both woredas, in Qewet it was more prominent and to Saudi Arabia, while in Bahir Dar it was more limited and concerned an internal migration flow from rural to urban areas.

QEWET WOREDA

In Qewet, most employment opportunities for young people were associated with agriculture. For example, in Yelen kebele, onion irrigation was reported as the economic activity absorbing the largest youth labour. However, agriculture work was seasonal, not for all ages and generally for men. It was also affected by crop failure and livestock loss due to droughts and climate change. Access to land because of fragmentation and competition over land was also reported as an important barrier. Only young people whose parents owned land, especially if it was close to rivers and small streams, could more easily engage in agriculture work. There seemed to be very little initiatives on land allocation for youth and the few participants who mentioned these initiatives argued that they were biased, for the wealthy people. In this context, young people increasingly associated agriculture with little economic returns. In the words of young men during an FGD in Abayatir:

> "The aspiration of youth in agriculture is dwindling. Youth are increasingly identifying agriculture with less return activity. As a result, the role of youth in agriculture is decreasing though not entirely. Particularly for the educated, agriculture is not a promising livelihood activity."

Besides agriculture, other income generating activities were very limited. Some young men were self-employed in sand mining or selling to close-by towns. Entrepreneurship was not common; participants explained only one case of a young woman who had started a hair salon. In Shewarobit, because of being a bit more urban, there were some additional opportunities for youth in construction and transportation.

The most common alternative that young people said took was migration, which seemed to be becoming the norm. A key informant alluded that young people were migrating even though there were opportunities (such as the provision of revolving fund by the government to start business). Participants argued that the majority who migrated were young people, including students, around the ages of 15 and 16. While some referred to both males and females migrating, most mentioned that a large part were young women. Most participants referred to Jidda in Saudi Arabia as the main destination. This migration was generally done illegally, requiring knowing someone in Jidda already and paying significant amounts of money of around 70,000-80,000 Birr to brokers. The following quote from an FGD with young men in Qewet illustrates how the desire to migrate requires contacts and money:

"As soon as I quitted my education, I aspired to migrate to Saudi. I have no promising option here. I tried but I have no contact with anyone who is in Saudi, which is an important pre-arrangement to get there. If I had had that contact, I would have got there and generate adequate income for my survival. My peers were migrated immediately after they quitted education because they have siblings in Jidda. Therefore, life is not hard for them but if you have no contact there, it is difficult. Since I have no relative or any person who facilitates for me, I was requested to pay 70,000 by brokers. I could not afford."

All study participants agreed that migration was increasing. When asked about the reasons to migrate, participants referred to migration as the best option for living because of the limitations of agriculture work (crop failure, land pressure and fragmentation), no job opportunities and poverty. Community members were aware of multiple cases of Qewet migrants who were doing better in Saudi Arabia and saw cases of migrants returning from Saudi Arabia and being able to start businesses and be more economically independent. These references were influencing communities' perceptions of migration as a good opportunity. Some young people stated that parents were pushing young people to migrate for considering it the best option. Others argued that they felt pressured by their peers. It was common that young people perceived themselves as a burden for their families when staying in Qewet, while migrating allowed them to help their families. The participants said that remittances from Saudi Arabia were becoming a main source of income in their communities. The following quote from an FGD with young men in Abayatir illustrates how peer pressure influences the desire to migrate in a context of limit socio-economic opportunities for youth:

"Every time when I see the life of my peers there in Saudi, I feel inferiority complex. I feel ashamed and irritated. There is no opportunity here. Land belongs to parents and I cannot command over that. Education is not a promising pathway out. Parents also push me to try at any cost. This is common in our area. When we see any one coming from Saudi who has established his/her own business young people are initiated to migrate." (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

When returning from Saudi Arabia, young people generally went to towns, as urban areas were seen as better accommodating young people's needs. Escaping from marriage and fears to have to marry were also mentioned as reasons for young women to migrate by some participants. However, more commonly participants argued that escaping marriage was not a common reason to migrate. Rather, it was argued that migration was delaying marriage as young women preferred migration over marriage. Some participants thought that marriages in Saudi Arabia were increasing. The following two quotes show these different argumentations about the relation between marriage and migration:

"Migration is not associated with child marriage. No one migrates to escape marriage. Instead, they give priority to Saudi than marriage. Marriage in Saudi is becoming common." (FGD young men, Abayatir kebele)

"By migrating to towns or abroad, girls free themselves from depending on parents economically. As a result, they rarely accept marriage proposal by parents at face value. I know females who migrate to Jidda as escaping mechanism." (IDI, young man, Medina kebele)

In summary, young people's life perspectives in Qewet were very limited because of the dependency on agriculture with additional barriers such as lack of land ownership or crop failure. Therefore, community members and young people themselves saw in migration the best option to guarantee their future and support their families.

BAHIR DAR WOREDA

As compared to Qewet, young people in Bahir Dar Zuria had more employment opportunities, such as irrigation, khat business, flower farm, and construction. Like in Qewet, agriculture is the main economic activity. Most study participants in FGDs and interviews mentioned as their source of income khat production, cultivation of vegetables and fruit, working at the flower farm and a few referred to fishery. Agriculture work was reported to be seasonal because people do not have irrigated land. Participants from an FGD with young men in Cheta Sostu kebele revealed:

> *"In this area only khat business is an economic opportunity for young people. But the majority of young people don't participate in this business because khat farms need sufficient water, in this area there is no enough water for their khat farm, the area gets water during rainy season only, because of this khat business occurs only during summer season."*

An FGD participant further argued that only 25% of the community might benefit from this type of business. Females were generally underrepresented in khat business. Some students participated in some temporary activities, namely khat cutting. In this case, students were said to lose attention on their education, because the more they cut the more they are paid. Elaborating on this, FGD participants noted:

> *"Khat business has a negative impact on young boys' education. Many young schoolchildren work by cutting khat. The employer or owner of the khat plantation would pay them based on the amount of khat the workers collect. For example, if one person cuts one kilogram of khat the owner will pay the worker 80 Birr. By implication, if the worker collects more he will get more. This has attracted young people including students. As a result, these young people give too much attention for this business and they terminate their school. Even sometimes, their parents keep their schoolchildren to work with them in the khat farm by compromising their school time, especially at the morning programme."* (FGD young men, Robit kebele)

Economic opportunities for young people were not evenly distributed among the kebeles included in this study. In Chenta Sostu kebele, one of the FGD participants said that there were no good economic opportunities for youth except very little khat production. In Robit kebele, participants said that there were different economic opportunities but that the economic benefit of khat decreased because the government started imposing taxes on people working in khat business. In the words of a participant from Robit kebele: "*The tax that is imposed by the government does not consider the profit that we get, because of this many young people quit the job.*"

Compared to Qewet where migration was dominantly international, in Bahir Dar migration was largely domestic. Young people were migrating to towns to search for better economic opportunities. The study results indicate that in Bahir Dar Zuria, there were different factors pushing rural-urban migration among youth: shortage of farmland, lack of economic opportunities, peer pressure, poverty, or aspiring city life.

Study participants had different views on the relation between migration and child marriage. On the one hand, FGD participants said that the rural-urban migration flow did not have an impact on child marriage. Young people left their place of birth when they were above 18 years old and the majority who migrated were males. On the other hand, some participants referred to cases where the rural-urban migration flow did have an impact of child marriage in the form of cancelling arranged marriages. When previous migrants visited their villages of origin, they encouraged other young women to go with them to the towns, thereby discouraging child marriage.

3.3.2 Education: value, costs and implications on child marriage

GENERAL VALUE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION, LESS FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

The results indicate than in both woredas, primary education was widely supported by parents and community members. This was referred to as a change compared with previous generations, especially for girls, as participants argued that girls and boys were given equal chances for education. In the words of a young woman during an FGD in Bahir Dar woreda: *"Parents let their daughters attend their education. They do not undermine girls education as before."* Most parents valued their children's education and highlighted that they did not want them to be illiterate as some adults were. In the words of a FGD female participant who had children:

> *"When we are asked to give signature we signed with finger print but this will not happen again on our children. We have to produce a literate generation."* (FGD young women, Chenta Sosestu kebele)

However, the perceived value of secondary education was influenced by multiple factors. In general, it was dependent on whether it was perceived to be associated with better life opportunities for young women and men. As the following quote illustrates, parents' support was generally ensured until grade 8, after which other factors such as economic possibilities, gender, distance, or young people's will also played a role.

> *"Parents support their children at least up to grade eight. Then they leave the decision to continue or quit for the children."* (FGD young women, Robit kebele)

There was a growing perception that higher education was not necessarily leading to better employment opportunities for young people. While various participants referred to education as a way to find work outside of agriculture and thereby improving the economic situation, it was a common and apparently increasing feeling among adults and youth that education was not a way to avoid poverty. Young people were also influenced by seeing other peers who dropped out of school doing better economically than those who continued with secondary education and remained unemployed after graduating. In the words of a young man during an FGD in Medina kebele:

> *"Value of education in our area is not constant. It is changing from the recent past where education is considered the path out of poverty, to the current situation where education is rarely considered as a way out. This emanates from unemployment of graduates. Of course, parents value their children's education, which they consider as compensating their own illiteracy."*

The little value on the benefits of education had various implications. One was the preference of migration among both young people as well as parents. In some cases, young people were the ones preferring to

migrate rather than continuing with their education, despite their parents' support of their education. For example, during an IDI, a young man in Abayatir kebele explained: *"Parents value education but children aspire to migrate. I know so many young male who quitted education. They say education is not a profitable business. The impact of migration mentality is critical here. They prefer migration above education."* In the words of a young man during an FGD in Medina kebele: *"Parents push young people to migrate once they observe improvement on the life of former migrants from the neighbourhood. Youth have no source of income. Young people are desperate about their future."* At the same time, in other cases it was the other way around. Parents seemed to be pushing their children to migrate rather than continuing with higher education.

Another implication, particularly for young women, was the parents' preference of the option of marriage rather than higher education. Most participants argued that parents' support of young women's education was generally limited to grades 8-10 when education was available in nearby areas. Higher education required moving to towns. It was common for parents to relate studying in towns with sexual debut and therefore fear of pregnancy outside marriage. Therefore, the perception of weak association between higher education and better employment opportunities, together with the fear of premarital pregnancies, made some parents to opt for pressuring young woman to marry as the best option. This was explained by a young man during an interview: *"Beyond grade eight is high school, which demands renting rooms at urban areas. Parents are suspicious about renting a house for their daughters. Indeed, girls learn sexuality there and this is difficult to manage. As a result, parents wish their daughters marry at some point or migrate to change her life."*

HIGH COSTS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The costs of secondary education also played a role, as it required the expenses of house rental in town. In general, most young people in all studied kebeles could not cover the costs of their education and were dependent on their parents' possibilities. In Qewet, some young women expressed that if they would have some income they would have more space to decide about their education. However, in Latamba kebele young women working in the flower farms used their income to support their family expenses rather than to finance their education. Moreover, young women quitted education to work in the flower farm.

The study also found cases in both woredas of young people fully or partially financing their secondary education themselves. In Qewet woreda, some young people returning from Saudi Arabia covered their own education costs when returning. A few participants mentioned that some young men worked on a railway project bypassing Medina kebele during summer and thereby financed their education. In Robit kebele, young men who were given a plot of khat farm by their parents made their own income by working on the farm before and after school time.

Participants had different views about the implications of young people's economic activities on child marriage. On the one hand, some expressed that young people's economic activities prevented child marriage by reducing their dependency on parents and contributing to young people's empowerment. At the same time, others argued that income generation was also a driver of child marriage because it gave young men the necessary resources to afford a marriage. The following quotes illustrate these different perceptions:

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"Actually, there is no alternative to cover our own educational expenses other than khat work and work on a piece of land from family gift. Covering of our own educational expenses has contribution to prevent child marriage, because girls develop confidence to refuse early marriage." (FGD, young women, Robit kebele)

"Dependency on parents makes young people vulnerable to child marriage. If they had had their own income, many girls would not have married. Income increases the bargaining power of young people on matters affecting their life. For instance, those girls who returned from Arab [countries] have good income and no one pushes them to marry. Parents subscribe to their ideas." (FGD, young women, Yelen kebele)

"Getting income promotes early marriage among the young. My friend, in this FGD, quitted education from grade 7. Now he has a good income and he can marry. Females do not work on onion production and harvesting in our area. Males invest their income on marriage arrangement rather than education. Once he constructs a house and has accumulated a certain amount of income for bride wealth, he starts to think of marriage. Since females want to marry to an economically good male, early marriage may occur. Parents of females also give due attention to the economic level of the potential husband." (FGD, young men, Yelen kebele)

Summing up, young people's future perspectives were characterized by limited employment opportunities in both woredas, leading to an increased value of migration and less value of secondary education. Engagement in economic activities including migration contributed to young people's empowerment which in turn could contribute to preventing child marriage although it was not necessarily always the case.

4. Discussion

In line with the widely supported argument that gender norms and inequalities are the core drivers of the (declining but still existing) practice of child marriage, the study provides more detailed insights into the prevailing expressions of gender inequalities in the studied areas of the Amhara region in Ethiopia. At the same time, the study also shows indications of changes in gender norms related to socio-economic contextual factors such as migration, which also have implications on child marriage.

Unpaid domestic work and the control of women's sexuality as the main obstacles for young women's future perspectives and core drivers of child marriage

Families' economic hardship and the prevention of teenage pregnancy are the two main reasons of child marriage in Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet woredas. These two drivers are closely linked to the two main expressions of gender inequalities in the studies areas: women's unpaid domestic work and the control of women's sexuality. As Nicole Jones at al. (2018) argue, in the Amhara region, despite a general decline of child marriage and girl's greater access to education, young women's workload due to domestic and care tasks together with the high value placed on their sexual purity are strongly limiting young women's life perspectives.

Although young women are also involved in economic activities outside the household, this is not reducing the gender inequalities in terms of division of labour. Rather, it is increasing young women's workload, who have to work both inside and outside the household. As the three R model by Diane Elson proposes, closing the gender gap requires recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid domestic and care work (Elson 2017). Neither in Bahir Dar Zuria nor Qewet this is happening. Moreover, the economic activities in which young women are involved are poorly paid, not compatible with the continuation of the education, or linked to family economic activities – mainly farming. Young women's engagement in these activities generally serves to support their families, leading to a stronger attachment to the household in comparison with young men, who more often earn money outside the household for themselves.

Young women's bigger role within the household is also linked to the high value of sexual purity. Some studies on child marriage in the Amhara region have already pointed at the centrality of this factor. Rodgers (2012) states that in the Amhara region girls worth is based on their virginity and their role of being a wife and mother. Nicole Jones et al. (2018) argue that the notion of sexual purity is key to understand the limits placed on girls and young women's lives in the Amhara region. This operational study provides further evidence that parents' concerns on maintaining the value of their daughters' sexual purity is not only a driver of (child) marriage but also a limitation in terms of young women's education perspectives or opportunities to enjoy social life. The parents' fear of young women engaging in pre-marital sex prevents the young women to attend secondary school because it requires moving to towns. Not going to secondary school restricts young women's leisure and free time and avoids their socialisation with peer male students/youth. This is an underlying reason for keeping young women more in the private sphere.

In a recent report about the centrality of sexuality to understand child, forced and arranged marriage, Greene et al. (2018) argue that the practice of child marriage will not be ended if the central role of sexuality limiting girls' prospects is not addressed. Our study supports this argument and provides further evidence

for the context of the Amhara region in Ethiopia on the need to address perceptions and expectations about young women's sexuality. Based on the study findings, it can be argued that the prevention of teenage pregnancy will not be enough to eliminate child marriage in Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet woredas. Besides access to and knowledge about contraceptives, it is key to engage in discussions about women's sexuality and address the issues of honour, virginity and sexual purity.

Indications of changes in gender norms influenced by a context of migration and a growing urban culture with direct implications on child marriage

While the gendered division of labour and the control of women's sexuality are rooted in long established gender arrangements, the study also provides indications of changes in gender norms which were said to have implications on the practice of child marriage. Building on ODI's (2015) conceptual framework on what drives changes in gender norms, the study findings suggest that in Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet woredas two of the main broad drivers of change are migration and urban culture.

Migration is becoming the preferred option for young people seeking better future perspectives. In Qewet, it seems that international migration to the Middle East is particularly common among young unmarried women, which could be related with the more limited economic opportunities for them in Ethiopia or a preference for these workers in the countries of destination. In Bahir Dar Zuria, migration is more from rural to urban settings, but it is also a driver of changes in gender norms. This migration trend delays marriage and therefore contributes to the decline of child marriage. The study also shows that it is both parents and youth who are increasingly seeing (international) migration, rather than higher education or marriage, as the best alternative for youth.

Through both international and rural-urban migration, young women seem to gain economic independence, confidence and greater freedom. Young people who migrate to Saudi Arabia and return to Ethiopia are more able to finance their education, start businesses or move to urban areas. In Bahir Dar Zuria, moving to urban settings makes young people less under control of parents or communities who are reinforcing gender norms. In some cases, it gave young women more power to refuse marriage. The influence of migration on gender norms has been reported in the literature. However, research also shows that migration can both challenge as well as entrench traditional gender norms (Marcus et al., 2014).

This study also provides evidence supporting this argument. Parents and communities perceived that living in urban settings exposes youth to new people, ideas and lifestyles, thereby increasing the chances they do things that do not correspond with the social and gender norms and roles in their rural communities. This increases parents' concerns, especially in relation to their daughters. In turn, some parents prefer to keep young women in the rural communities rather than supporting them to move to urban settings, even if this implies not continuing with their secondary education. When allowed to migrate, female migrants seem to mostly end up working as domestic workers in the Middle East, which may yield a short term benefit, but keeps young women in domestic work without having acquired higher education – which is reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms. The migration experience can have other negative sides too: there is evidence of issues of violence, rape, or excessive work among Ethiopian domestic workers in the Middle East (Demissie, 2018). Also, there is evidence of mental health problems among migrants returning from the Middle East as a results of adverse migration experiences (Busza et al. 2017).

At the same time, the lack of employment opportunities in the study areas which is leading to migration and contributing to changes in gender norms seems to also decrease the perceived value of secondary education. The widely acknowledged value of primary education for girls and young women, is a trend of last decades, contributing to closing the gender gap in access to primary education in the Amhara region and increasing young women's future perspectives besides marriage. However, at the same time, the lack of employment opportunities and the role models of migrants is leading to very little hopes among parents and youth themselves on secondary education. Higher education is not seen as creating more or better employment opportunities. Besides, young people are largely dependent on their parents to finance their education. As high schools are not available at the kebele level, secondary education requires renting a house and covering additional living costs which rural families can often not afford. This reinforces the perception of marriage as a better option for young women. Similarly, Jones et al. (2015) argue that young women may marry earlier simply because they lack "better" options.

This shows that in Bahir Dar Zuria and Qewet, economic opportunities, migration, the perceived value of education and gender norms are complexly interrelated with implications on the practice of child marriage. As Svanemyr et al. (2015) argue, all these complex interrelations require constant research and attention in programming.

The implications of changes in parents-children's relationship

Studies about child marriage in Ethiopia have highlighted that parents are the main decision maker regarding a girl's marriage (Erulkar, 2013). While this study shows that arranged marriages are common, it also shows that it is becoming more usual that young people take the initiative telling their parents when and whom they want to marry (parental approval is still seen as central). This supports the findings of McDougal et al. (2018) that while elders influence the decision making process, young women also participate in the negotiation and in the final decision. Moreover, this study suggests that the increasing tendency of young people proposing to their parents when and whom they want to marry is (partly) related to the changing context as discussed above. Some parents feel they cannot impose marriage on their children because they would not be listened to, or they would leave home early, for example to migrate to urban settings (which could lead to the shame of premarital pregnancy again). Cases of divorce or marriage cancelation through court cases are indications of young people opposing or confronting parents preferences.

The changing context of migration, influence of urban culture, increased education levels of young people and changing social and gender norms could also contribute to widening the intergenerational gap in terms of ideas and attitudes which makes communication between parents and children difficult. This suggests that changing contexts and norms can be perceived differently depending on variables such as age. However, both parents and youth themselves perceive this intergenerational gap and feel that a better mutual understanding is needed. Therefore, programmes can play a role by supporting discussions and skills that enhance mutual understanding to avoid that these changes increase confrontation or weaken relationships.

5.Summary and conclusions

Traditional social and gender norms influence the dynamics within families, including the division of roles and responsibilities, power, decision making processes and intergenerational communication. Domestic tasks mostly rely exclusively on young females who are often also engaged in economic activities, leading to a double workload. Males, especially fathers, are generally the head of the families and responsible for key decisions, including on marriage. Although some mothers influence and participate in decision making processes, fathers often have the final say. Young people are often left out of the discussions and decisions.

The parenting style seems to be predominantly authoritarian although advising children instead of punishing them has become more common. Intergenerational communication is limited, and the difference in education between parents and children was reported as a main obstacle for the mutual understanding. Parents exercise stronger control on young women than young men. It seems that young women have less influence on important issues affecting their lives such as marriage and education and young men have more time and space for social life. This stricter control on daughters is related to the high value of young women's sexual purity, which makes parents to ensure that their daughter will not engage in premarital sex. In some cases, young women themselves choose for early marriage, to be able to have sexual relations with their (preferred) boyfriends.

Marriage has a strong social value in the communities under study and is perceived as central for family formation. Marriage, including child marriage, is generally arranged by parents. While young men are more often informed about marriage negotiation from the beginning, it seems more common for young women to be only informed at the very latest stage, making the consent from the bride side weaker. The unpaid domestic work and the control on women's sexuality are found to be main expressions of gender inequalities, determining the value of marriage and causing child marriage. At the same time, the cases of marriage cancellation and divorce can be seen as an indication of changes in the value of (child) marriage.

The findings show that marriage is strongly related to young people's futures perspectives. These are characterised by very limited employment and economic opportunities for youth. These limitations have led to increasing migration flows; international migration in the case of Qewet and rural-urban flows in Bahir Dar Zuria. At the same time, limited employment opportunities have affected parents' and young people's perspectives on the value of secondary education.

The implications of this context on (child) marriage are diverse. On the one side, young people's prioritization of looking for economic opportunities, especially through migration, has led to avoidance of child marriage and delay of marriage in general. At the same time, the lack of employment opportunities has also reinforced the perception of marriage as a better option for young women than secondary education. Migration and urban culture are found to be influencing changes in gender norms, especially in terms of young women's empowerment. For example, young women who have some course of income through migration seem more able to decide about their marriage and life.

6.Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations for the Yes I Do programme are made:

- **Promote a more gender balanced division of domestic work and address communities' concerns about young women's sexuality**

Gender inequality is a central factor in the practice of child marriage. The increased value of girls and young women's (primary) education as well as young women's participation in economic activities outside the household are indications of changes in traditional gender norms. However, unpaid domestic work for which only women are responsible plus the great value placed on women's sexual purity are still posing persistent gender inequality and drivers of child marriage. A gender transformative approach within Yes I Do requires special attention to promoting a more gender balanced division of domestic work and addressing communities' concerns about young women's sexuality. This would include finding or developing vocabulary and discourse to frame sexuality in a positive way rather that fear of young people's sexuality; and address the issue of honour.

- **Build skills among youth and parents to enhance mutual understanding and trust for more and better intergenerational communication**

Young people are found to be generally left out of decision making processes within families, including on marriage. At the same time, the study found indications of increasing discussion and communication between parents and children. However, there is a strong intergenerational gap influenced by differences in education, attitudes and perspectives. The Yes I Do programme could support both parents and youth by sharing tools and developing skills to increase mutual understanding, reduce this intergenerational gap and strengthen communication and discussion between parents and children.

- **Explore means to support young women's secondary education through financial support or by addressing parents' fears related to young women moving to more urban areas**

All kebeles had primary schools until grade 8 and only in Abayatir kebele until grade 10. Therefore, the continuation of secondary education requires youth to move to urban settings. This does not only require additional economic resources, but it implies (a perceived) parents' loss of control over their children and acceptance of the influence of 'urban culture' on their children. The latter is commonly feared by parents, especially in relation to young women's sexuality. The Yes I Do programme could enhance young women's opportunities to continue with secondary education through financial resources or by identifying positive cases/role models of young women who have finished secondary education successfully.

- **Contribute to increase young people's economic opportunities**

Young people's future perspectives are defined by a general lack of economic opportunities and young people seem largely dependent on their parents. This has not only led to an increase of migration flows but also to a questioning of the value for higher education and, especially for young women, making marriage a more attractive option. At the same time, some economic opportunities, such as young women's work in flower farms have led to school dropout, because of the difficulties to combine this kind of work with

education. The Yes I Do programme would need to address the perceived gap between education and economic opportunities, for example by supporting initiatives on youth entrepreneurship, and make sure that income generating activities for youth are compatible with their education.

- **Address with parents and young people the meaning of full and free consent from both spouses**

By definition, arranged marriages are initiated by parents or guardians but with consent of the bride and groom. However, it is unclear to what extent there is full and free consent, especially from the bride side. It seems that the non-opposition or non-confrontation of parents' will and decisions is taken as consent, even if young women are informed only on the wedding day itself. Unpacking the notion of free and full consent, what it means and why it is important, might contribute to a decline in arranged marriages which also include child marriage.

As for **further research**, the following topics have been identified:

- Further explore the implications of the migration dynamic to Saudi Arabia of youth in Qewet and the implications on the future perspectives of these youth and on marriage.
- Further explore the influence of urban culture on life perspectives of young people moving to urban settings, including on marriage as well as on the effect in the relationship with their parents and families.
- Explore the implications of the cancelation of arranged marriages.
- Better understand young people's preferences on why, whom and when to marry and the decision making process around it, in marriages that are not initially arranged by parents.
- Better understand the implications of divorce, especially on young women.

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