



**“NO GIRL SHOULD BE A CHILD BRIDE”**  
Taking Action to End Child Marriage in Lay Armachiho  
District, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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# FORWARD

Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD) is an African Diaspora women's campaign and support charity that was set up in 1985. FORWARD's work responds to the need to safeguard dignity and advance the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of African women and girls globally. FORWARD invests in individuals, groups, communities and organisations to transform social norms and harmful practices to help improve the quality of life and wellbeing of vulnerable girls and women.

FORWARD's vision is that women and girls live in dignity, are healthy and have the choices and equal opportunities necessary for them to fulfil their potential. FORWARD educates policy makers, communities and the public to facilitate social change and realise the full potential of women and girls. We advocate for sexual and reproductive health to be central to wellbeing. We support programmes to tackle gender-based violence, in particular, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. FORWARD empowers and mobilises vulnerable girls and women to raise their voices and exercise their right to services and choices.

## ProFutures Development Initiative (PFDI)

PFDI is an Ethiopian organisation established in 2011. PFDI envisages an improved standard of living for young people in Ethiopia. It hopes to achieve this through ongoing consultation between numerous actors including young women, their communities, schools and the Woreda governing bodies. PFDI has a particular focus on harmful traditional practices including child marriage. It hopes to increase community support for young women to help end the practice. Furthermore, PFDI increases girl's access to services and information about sexual and reproductive health. It trains young women in income generating activities.

*Please note the views and opinions expressed in this report represent those of the author, and not necessarily those of the various organisations that supported the work.*

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*Lead researchers from FORWARD start to process the data, with help from the PEER participants*

## Acronyms

<b>FORWARD</b>	Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development
<b>PEER</b>	Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research
<b>PFDI</b>	ProFutures Development Initiative
<b>PRs</b>	Peer Researchers
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health

## Glossary

<b>Injera</b>	Flat bread which is staple food in Ethiopia
<b>Gesho</b>	Leaves used to ferment traditional beer
<b>Kibre nitsihina</b>	Virginity
<b>Kumo ker</b>	A derogatory name given to a woman who has not married young
<b>Lekso</b>	Mourning custom
<b>Sefiet</b>	Basketry
<b>Tella</b>	Local beer
<b>Woreda</b>	District

# Executive Summary

Child marriage is a grave human rights violation that has a major social, economic and health impact on girls, women and their communities. Child marriage is a union where one or both spouses are under the age of 18. Child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty and gender inequality and blocks the potential of girls and women<sup>i</sup>. Despite laws prohibiting marriage before the age of 18, Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally. 41% of women in Ethiopia are married by 18, and in Amhara, where this research was conducted, 74% of women are married before they turn 18, and the median age of marriage is 14.7<sup>ii</sup>.

This report shares the findings from Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation Research (PEER). In PEER, members of the target community are trained to conduct interviews with individuals from their own social networks. Following recruitment and training, child brides designed and carried out conversational interviews with married girls like themselves. The research was carried out in Lay Armachiho District in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia.

## Key Findings

The findings are based solely on the words of the PEER participants, whose quotes are used throughout the report. The PEER participants described their lives, dominated by poverty and gender inequality. Most girls are removed from school due to entrenched social norms undervaluing girls' education. Most commonly married at 12 and 15, girls are expected to enter a sexual relationship as soon as they are married. Excluded from decisions affecting their own lives, most 'knew nothing' about arrangements being made for their marriage, as it is normally 'parents or elders of the family who make the decision'.

## Explanations for child marriage

The interviews unearthed multiple, complex and interrelated reasons for child marriage. Traditional beliefs and attitudes held by parents and other key decision makers in the community are highly influential. This is intrinsically linked to the desire to protect a girl's virginity as a girl's chastity is perceived to be closely associated with a family's honour. Likewise, some participants explained families marry their daughters young to 'link' their family to another family of good lineage.

For some families, marrying daughters young is considered to be a way out of poverty, as they can benefit from the bride price, and 'hand over' the financial responsibility for their daughters to another family. Child marriage is seen as a means of achieving social security, as families believe their sons-in-law and grandchildren will be able to take better care of them in old age than their daughters. Child marriage is also fuelled by the absence of other viable options or choices for girls and their families. In some cases girls choose to get married, hoping it will improve their quality of life.

## Consequences of child marriage

This study also provides a unique insight into how child marriage impacts the lives of young women. Although some of the PEER participants felt they had benefited from child marriage, most felt that 'no girl should be a child bride'. The PEER participants explained how child marriage inhibited their potential, and prevented them from continuing with their education.

Many PEER participants shared that they felt inferior or of 'lower status' than their unmarried friends. Girls spoke about feeling 'trapped' inside their house, cut off from their friends, family and community. Commonly the child bride's marriage forces them to grow up too quickly and deal with adult issues 'before they are ready'. Child brides live 'under' their husbands and are treated like servants rather than wives. The participants spoke of their dislike and even 'dread' of sex with their husbands. Many were sad at the prospect of 'missing out' on the chance of a relationship based on love and attraction.

Child marriage has a detrimental physical impact on young girls. The PEER participants described their vulnerability to domestic violence and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sex, pregnancy and child birth are traumatic and painful for child brides. Complications during child birth are common and some participants lost their children in child birth. The child brides participating in this study had received little or no information about sex, pregnancy, childbirth or child care. Sex is a 'taboo' subject and parents rarely talk to their children or help prepare them for marriage.

However, the PEER participants explained how 'things are already improving' for girls as programmes addressing child marriage are having a positive impact. Adamant that their daughters should not have to suffer as they have, they emphasised the need for increased access to education, and choices for girls. The PEER participants expressed their desire to maintain their role in preventing and reaching out to girls at risk of child marriage.

# FORWARD and PFDI's Interventions

Using the PEER findings, and the participants' recommendations, FORWARD and PFDI have initiated an intervention which aims to prevent child marriage, whilst simultaneously improving the lived realities of married girls. The PEER participants formed a number of girls' clubs, and wider network of child brides. The clubs and networks provide girls with a safe space in which they can access other support, advice and counselling from their peers and specialists. Through the clubs, FORWARD provided business skills training, including bookkeeping, financial management and customer care. Using the training, the child brides have established a cattle and dairy farming business. The child brides' confidence and capacity has increased, and they have shared the profit between them. PFDI also work with, and facilitate child brides' engagement with, key stake holders including political, traditional and religious leaders to improve the position of child brides at local, regional, national and international levels.

## Recommendations

The recommendations provided here are based on the findings of the research, the feedback from the PEER participants in the final workshop, and the consultations with stakeholders that concluded the research. They also take into account learning from FORWARD and PFDI's child marriage intervention programme.

**Sensitive and culturally relevant approaches are crucial to responding to child marriage.** Child marriage is a key part of the social identity in communities where it is practised. Acknowledging this will build trust and relationships with communities, helping to facilitate reflection on these social norms and the adoption of new behaviours. Insensitive interventions cause parents and community members to become defensive, and resistant to change.

**Programmes must recognise the interests of multiple stakeholders in the decision making process.** More often than not, girls are not involved in the decision for them to be married. Parents or male members of the community normally make the decision about when and to whom a girl gets married. Without working with them to change their perspectives, it will be impossible to end child marriage. Programmes should support parents and their daughters to communicate openly about their concerns. Girls must be empowered and equipped with skills, confidence and information to convince decision makers of the merits of education and comparative risks of child marriage.

**Engage with respected members of the community to facilitate behavioural change.** Priests and other community leaders are important stakeholders as they have influence and command respect in communities. Working with respected leaders from other communities, in Ethiopia and globally, that have been involved in child marriage prevention programmes could also be successful. Families who have married their daughters later could be used as positive role models.

**Promote new norms that value girls' education and wellbeing.** Programme messaging must create new aspirational social norms that benefit girls and child brides. To do this, stakeholders could sensitively share findings from this report. Examples include how girls who aren't forced into child marriages are more likely to make committed and respectful wives, or how educated girls have a wider range of options in life, and are more able to take care of their husbands and children. Providing incentives and support may encourage families to keep their daughters in school, for example paying school fees, and helping to pay for books and uniforms. This would require the identification of those in greatest need of financial or material support and assistance.

**Create networks and girls' clubs to improve the confidence and capacity of girls and child brides.** Clubs and networks provide girls and child brides with a safe space where they can raise ideas and concerns, ending their isolation and building their confidence. Supporting each other and working together, networks of girls can raise their voices to influence key stakeholders, facilitate change and improve wellbeing and rights of all girls.

**Improve girls' access to information and services on family planning and sexual and reproductive health.** Information should be distributed through clubs and networks, to both child brides and girls at risk of child marriage. Stakeholders should work with legislators, schools and health care workers to strengthen information and access to services targeting young people. Because of the benefits to girls' health and their access to opportunities, delaying first pregnancy should be a priority.

**Programmes should provide skills and livelihood opportunities for girls and child brides.** This includes providing girls with business skill training and confidence building activities. Small loans would help individuals and groups kick-start their own businesses.

**Provide an enabling policy and legal environment that responds to the diverse needs of all girls.** There is a need to create inclusive educational options for child brides, as at present the prevailing policy environment prevents married girls from accessing education. Laws on minimum age of marriage should be enforced at local levels.

# I. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage has historically been one of FORWARD's three key focus areas, the others being female genital mutilation (FGM) and Obstetric Fistula. Responding positively to the global rise in attention to child marriage FORWARD has collaborated with organisations at the global and local level. Through these partnerships FORWARD aims to amplify the voices of child brides, create initiatives to respond to their specific needs, and improve partner organisations' ability to address child marriage effectively. FORWARD's programme "Advancing the Health and Rights of African Women and Girls" spans five African countries (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana and Sierra Leone) and aims to advance and safeguard the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women, particularly those at risk of and affected by child marriage.

This report documents research, and the following two year intervention project in Lay Armachiho District in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia. During this project, entitled "Taking Action to End Child Marriage in Ethiopia" FORWARD helped create, and worked in partnership with ProFutures Development Initiative (PFDI), an organisation run by the child brides who took part in the research which informed the intervention.

This report is a consequence of FORWARD's strategy to generate evidence through PEER to inform and shape a programme to invest in the needs of child brides and those at risk of child marriage. The key objectives of the PEER were as follows:

- Shed light on the lived realities of child brides and girls at risk of child marriage, their understanding of the causes and consequences of child marriage, and their access to information and services;
- Use the findings to inform and strengthen programmes focusing on child marriage and related issues;
- Empower child brides and girls at risk, strengthening their voice and ensuring that they are at the centre of research and programmes that concern them; and,
- Increase awareness among the community and the policy makers about the key issues and concerns of child brides and girls at risk through stakeholders' meetings and dissemination of report findings.

This report outlines FORWARD and PFDI's interventions in Ethiopia. Where other actors focus on preventing child marriage, FORWARD works with girls who are already married. Using PEER, it was possible to engage child brides from the offset, when they were trained to interview girls like themselves and collect data on child marriage. Using PEER built the skills, confidence and motivation of the participants, enabling the creation

of networks of child brides and the establishment of PFDI.

This report is divided into six sections. This chapter sets the scene, providing detailed information about child marriage and the local context. The second chapter outlines the PEER methodology, and highlights the benefits of this method of data collection. Quotes from the child brides are used to explore the lived realities of child brides in Chapter Three. This encompasses a range of topics including girls' understanding of the causes and consequences of child marriage, and their access to information and services. Chapter Four details the benefits of PEER for the participants and Chapter Five outlines the PEER participant's recommendations. FORWARD and PFDI's intervention is explained in Chapter Six, followed by the conclusions and recommendations in Chapter Seven.

## I.1 CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is the legal or customary union between two people, of whom one or both spouses is below the age of 18. The term 'early marriage' is sometimes used interchangeably with child marriage. Early marriage is when both spouses are above 18, but other factors mean they are unready to consent to marriage<sup>iii</sup>. Child marriage can also be referred to as 'forced marriage', where marriage is 'conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and is a marriage in which duress – whether physical or emotional – is a factor'<sup>iv</sup>.

National and international communities have come to recognise child marriage as a violation of girls' human rights, and a hindrance to key development outcomes<sup>v</sup>. Child marriage is linked to, and will inhibit countries in, achieving six of the Millennium Development Goals including poverty, girls' education, maternal and child health and HIV and AIDS. Although child marriage can affect boys, it affects girls disproportionately and with graver consequences<sup>vi</sup>.

The causes and consequences of child marriage are complex, and often the line between the two is blurred<sup>vii</sup>. Child marriage can be attributed to numerous factors including poverty and insecurity, limited access to education and cultural practices. Child marriage is closely associated with poor maternal health outcomes including life threatening disabilities such as obstetric fistula. Isolated within their communities with limited access to information, social support and services, child brides are at increased risk of sexual and intimate partner violence compared to girls who are married at an older age. Child marriage compromises girls' development, and reinforces the gendered nature of poverty<sup>viii</sup>.

Child marriage is a violation of numerous international human rights instruments. These include Article 16 of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that women should have the same right as men to “freely choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent”<sup>ix</sup>. In signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), governments commit to taking “effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the children,” including, among other practices, child marriage. However, despite national laws and international agreements, child marriage remains a real and present threat to the human rights, lives and health of girls in many developing countries.

## 1.2 THE CONTEXT – ETHIOPIA

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, home to an estimated 85,000,000<sup>x</sup> people, is located in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is one of the least urbanised countries in the world, with only 16% of its population living in urban areas<sup>xi</sup>. The sex ratio is 95 males per 100 females, with some regional discrepancies. In rural areas the ratio is 97 males per 100 females, and in urban areas the ratio is 86 males per 100 females. Ethiopia did not have a health policy until it adopted a World Health Organisation health policy in the early 1960s. Maternal, new-born and child health has become a key focus, as well as the halt and reversal of the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/Aids, tuberculosis and malaria.

According to the World Health Organisation, the number of births attended by a skilled health personnel was as low as 10% in 2011 and in 2010 the maternal mortality ratio was 500 per 100,000 live births<sup>xii</sup>. The total fertility rate is 4.8 children per woman, and the crude birth rate is 34.5 births per 1,000 people, although this too differs substantially between rural and urban areas<sup>xiii</sup>. 93.6% of women reported experiencing at least one barrier to accessing health care, with the most common problem being having to take public transport<sup>xiv</sup>. There is also a wider pattern of gender discrimination in Ethiopia. For example, 50.8% of women between the ages of 15-49 have received no education, compared to 32.6% of men<sup>xv</sup>. 68% of women believed that a husband beating his wife was justified, although this has decreased from 81% in 2005<sup>xvi</sup>.

Lay Armachiho Region, where this study took place, is situated in the Amhara region in northern Ethiopia. According to the 2013 census, Lay Armachiho is home to 180,930 people, 90,309 of which are female<sup>xvii</sup>. 97% of Lay Armachiho's population is Orthodox Christian, and

the next biggest group is Muslim (2%)<sup>xviii</sup>. 74,391 people are said to be economically active in Lay Armachiho, and 46% of these are women<sup>xix</sup>.

## 1.3 THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

Child marriage is a pervasive problem in Ethiopia, and the practice is especially prevalent in rural areas. The median age at first marriage for girls living in rural areas is 16.5, on average around 2 years younger than girls living in urban areas. In Amhara, where this PEER was carried out, the rate of child marriage is among the highest in the world. The median age for women to get married is 14.7 years, and girls are known to be married as young as 7. This is a stark comparison to Addis Ababa, where the median age of first marriage is 21.4<sup>xx</sup>.

Ethiopia has acceded to numerous international and regional human rights conventions and consensus documents that prohibit child marriage, as shown in the table below. This is important as Article 9(4) of the Ethiopia's Federal Constitution states that all ratified international instruments are considered part of the country's national legislations.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Signatory
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	Ratified in 1993
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	Ratified in 1981
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	Ratified in 2002
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of women in Africa	Signed but not ratified

In addition, Ethiopian national laws guarantee protection against child marriage. For instance, Article 36(1) (d) of the Federal Constitution states that children must be protected against exploitive practices. Although the Constitution does not set a minimum age for marriage, Article 34(2) states that ‘marriage shall be based on the free and full consent of the intending spouses’. This can be interpreted to imply a minimum age of 18 years in accordance with the existing legislation that addresses consent. Law making power regarding family and marital matters falls within the domain of Regional States and the ‘Revised Federal Family Law’ applies only in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, which are under federal administration.

The Amhara National Regional State Family Code of 2003 is the applicable law in the Lay Armachiho district.

**Article 18 of the Amhara Family code states:** *'Neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage... However the Justice Bureau of the Region may, on the application of the future spouses, of the parents or the guardian of one of them, for a serious cause, grant dispensation of not more than two years.'*

Prevention efforts by Government and non-Government partners have started to make important in-roads in the region. For example, the UK aid funded End Child Marriage Programme, or Finote Hiwote, implemented by the Ethiopian government through the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWYCA), was launched in March 2012. The key focus is on creating and disseminating key messages to support the End Child Marriage campaign. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of the government to design, plan, implement, monitor, and finance large scale programmes to end child marriage in Ethiopia<sup>xxi</sup>.

Likewise, between 2004 and 2006, The Population Council pilot tested a programme aiming to reduce adolescent girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Over the course of two years they carried out 'community conversations', support to enable girls to remain in school, and conditional cash transfers for girls who remain unmarried over the course of the programme. At the end of the 2 year programme, compared with girls age 10-14 in the control site, the girls in the project site were three times more likely to be in school, and one tenth as likely to be married<sup>xxii</sup>.

Despite having some success, in focussing solely on preventing child marriage these programmes fail to recognise the 'forgotten generation' of girls who are already married. Consequently, countless child brides in Ethiopia remain isolated, powerless and in poverty. The following chapters will describe how FORWARD and PFDI, are working with girls who are already married, to improve their lived realities as a route to ending the practice of child marriage once and for all.



PEER participant with her child and a fellow participant

## 2 - METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATORY ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION AND RESEARCH (PEER)

Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation Research (PEER) stems from anthropological and social research methods that foster and focus on trust and relationships. In PEER, members of the target population are trained as PEER Researchers (PRs), and as such conduct in-depth conversational interviews with individuals from their social networks.

PEER was chosen for this research because it yields rich narrative data and can provide crucial insights into how people understand and negotiate behaviour and (hidden) power relationships. As the PRs have pre-existing relationships with the interviewees, and through the use of third person interviewing techniques, PEER provides a unique opportunity to address sensitive issues. Furthermore, as child brides themselves, the researchers are the 'experts' in child marriage, making them more likely to design and ask appropriate and relevant questions.

Above and beyond data collection, PEER has a transformational effect on the participants, enabling them to develop skills, build their confidence and create relationships with women affected by issues similar to their own. Once isolated or ostracised in their community, during the course of the PEER the participants became an inspiration to their families and communities. Confident and eloquent, these young women are dedicated to maintaining their role as key actors in efforts to tackle child marriage.

FORWARD has used PEER to explore a range of sexual and reproductive health related issues to help design and inform programme interventions in the UK, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Tanzania. This methodology has been trialled and refined extensively by Options, the international consulting branch of Marie Stopes.

### 2.2 SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

To begin the process, four PEER Supervisors (PSs) were recruited. Each of them supported five PRs over the course of the PEER process, responding to problems when necessary and helping transcribe the interviews and record data. The PSs chosen were literate, compassionate and non-judgmental with exceptional listening skills. One was from Musebambe, one from Gindmetaya and two from Tekaldengay. Three of the supervisors had attended school up to grade 10 while one had only attended up to grade 7.

The four supervisors recruited 20 married women between the ages of 15 and 20 years, who had been married between the ages of 14 and 17, to act as PRs. They did this through word of mouth, and with the help of the district government officials, locally known as Woreda Officers. 15 out of the 20 PRs were still married, and five were divorced. Ten of the girls were mothers and one was pregnant. On average, the PRs had only attended school up to grade 6. The PEER researchers were paid a small fee for their participation in the PEER process to cover their expenses. The profiles of the PEER Supervisors and Researchers can be found in Table 1.

Age at time of study	Age of 1st marriage	Years in education	No of Children	Role
15	14	4	0	Researcher
15	14	5	0	Researcher
16	13	5	1	Researcher
17	16	7	0	Researcher
17	15	8	0	Researcher
17	16	10	0	Supervisor
17	17	8	0	Researcher
18	17	10	0	Supervisor
18	17	10	0	Researcher
18	15	9	0	Researcher
18	14	6	1	Researcher
18	14	7	0	Supervisor
18	15	0	1	Researcher
18	15	7	1	Researcher
18	15	8	0	Researcher
18	15	7	0	Researcher
18	14	5	Pregnant	Researcher
19	15	6	1	Researcher
19	16	5	0	Researcher
19	14	8	1	Researcher
19	15	4	1	Researcher
19	16	7	1	Researcher
20	16	9	1	Researcher
20	16	10	1	Supervisor

Table 1: Profiles of PEER researchers

## 2.3 PEER TRAINING

The PEER researchers were trained over the course of a three day workshop, facilitated by FORWARD and PFDI. The process was participatory, with emphasis on empowering the PRs, by enabling them to recognise their position as 'experts' on child marriage. With help from the facilitators and PSs, the PRs developed prompts to guide in-depth conversational interviews. The interviews were based around three themes, which together provide a comprehensive picture of child marriage in Amhara. The first theme was daily life, and the lived experiences of child brides in the region. The second explored the causes of child marriage. The third explored the impact of child marriage on the lives of young girls, and their access to information and services. A sample of the questions used can be found in the Annex.

## 2.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Having completed the training, each of the PRs carried out three interviews with two friends or peers over a period of 6 weeks. Each PR therefore carried out six interviews, totalling 120 interviews all together. Those PRs able to write made brief notes immediately after the interviews on the key issues or stories that emerged. The supervisors met the PRs between interviews to

provide support and guidance, and transcribe interviews, and collect data. PFDI and FORWARD staff oversaw the process, coordinating and translation the interviews.

Once the interviews were complete, the lead researchers from FORWARD and PFDI conducted additional debriefing sessions with the PRs, either individually or in small groups. During these meetings, they discussed the responses and stories that arose in the interviews, asking for more detail when necessary.

Once the debriefings were complete, the PRs assembled again to discuss the research findings. This also served as an opportunity for the participants to feedback on the process and make suggestions for improvement. Using the observations they made during research, and their personal experiences, the PEER participants also made recommendations for programmes working with child brides and/or girls at risk of child marriage. The participants were thanked with gifts and certificates.

The data were then fully processed and analysed thematically by the lead researcher. Emerging themes were assigned codes and the data were divided into text units, paragraphs and stories. Data were then re-read, and illustrative quotations were selected to capture the essence of each theme. These quotes are used extensively throughout this report to exemplify key themes and unusual stories.



*Lead researcher from FORWARD helping transcribe information from the PEER Researchers*



*Presentations during the stakeholder meeting at the end of the research*

## 2.5 FINAL PEER WORKSHOP

In the final workshop, the PEER findings were shared with key stakeholders from various governmental ministries and non-governmental organisations. The PRs played the central role in the workshop, and relished the opportunity to raise their concerns and share their learning with key decision makers.

## 2.6 LIMITATIONS OF PEER

As with any method of data collection, the PEER approach has its limitations. As qualitative research, subjectivity is an issue and some bias on behalf of the researcher is unavoidable. Time and budget restrictions, also mean that the sample size is small which means

the findings may not be representative of the broader population in Amhara. What is more, the recruitment process also holds some bias, as the opinions of the participants may not represent those of child brides who did not participate. In PEER, the quality of the results is influenced by the capacity of the participants, and the quality of the training they received.

However, every effort was made to eliminate bias as far as possible. The rigorous and participatory method in which the questions were designed means that the data collected are rich and informative. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and provided with a safe space in which to share their intimate experiences and views. Mindful of personal subjectivities, the authors have interpreted and represented the words of the respondents as accurately as possible.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS: CHILD MARRIAGE THROUGH GIRLS' EYES

The following findings are directly based on the views of PEER participants and are illustrated with quotes from the interviews with child brides, and subsequent discussions. Section 3.1 provides some context, describing child brides' daily lives and access to education. Section 3.2 sheds light on how child marriage influences the lives and wellbeing of young women. Section 3.3 explores the impact of interventions to tackle child marriage, 3.4 looks at the influence of laws prohibiting child marriage, and 3.5 discusses access to information and resources. The PEER participants' aspirations for their own daughters can be found in section 3.6.

#### 3.1 DAILY LIFE AS EXPERIENCED BY GIRLS

In the first interview, the interviewees were asked questions about their daily lives, to provide a context for the study, and to help identify the causes of child marriage. This section illustrates the hardship and poverty faced by people living in Amhara, and the disadvantage and discrimination faced by girls and women.

*Life in this area is very hard and in poverty. Sometimes if we eat breakfast we would have nothing to eat for lunch or dinner.*

*It is hard for us to win the struggle with life.*

*Girls in this area live within a big poverty some even do not have something to eat and drink. They even cannot fulfil their children's basic necessity.*

*I have to pay for fire wood, water, food and house rent from the money I make from the labour work. But it is not enough to fulfil all our demand.*

Many participants described how gender inequality affects all aspects of girls' lives, inhibiting their ability to reach their potential. These quotes show how traditional and cultural norms define a woman's place as in the home, and limit their decision making power. Women shoulder the burden of all domestic work, yet are commonly undervalued and seen as weak by women and men alike.

*I usually wake up early in the morning and prepare the bed, clean the house, cook breakfast, prepare coffee, bake injera, prepare sauce, fetch water, wash cloth, brew tella, sew decorating items with grass, prepare the flour which helps to bake injera, wash children, and bake bread which helps to prepare tella. I also participate in agricultural activities. After I eat my dinner I usually go to bed at 12.*

*Girls must keep their homes and families clean, and wash the family cloth. They also clean the house and take care of the children. A woman is expected to do a lot of things.*

*A saying goes, 'a girl to the kitchen and a man to the stage.'*

*Females are weak compared to males. We can't work as they do. The life of the woman is weak and small as a result of the fact that male spends much of his time outside home unlike female.*

*There is a saying called "although the woman does everything it is the man who gives decision".*

Constantly undermined and undervalued, young women feel extremely vulnerable. This is both in terms of their physical safety, and susceptibility to sickness and sexually transmitted infections. Others felt vulnerable due their limited capacity to take part in income generating activities outside the home.

*I become poor because I am a woman because I am not capable of going wherever I would like to go. If I move around I might get raped and exposed to HIV and other problems. I am leading a life which is subsistence. I have no deposited money which may help me when get ill.*

*I might be attacked and my money will be stolen unlike the male. This will also affect my life.*

*I am poor because I am a woman. I am able to work as male counterparts but I am not in a position to move and work whatever I like to perform as men do. I feel I am exposed to problems; therefore I perform the household chores every day such as spinning cotton, washing clothes for money. My income is subsistence. This is the very reason that makes me poor.*



Women selling wares in Lay Armachiho

*Because of the fact that I am female and not able to work anywhere and anytime, I am vulnerable to be poor. In addition to this I am responsible to take care of my children. Therefore I am not in a position to work anywhere.*

Interestingly, despite the hardship they describe, many of the PEER participants feel that it is ‘others’ rather than themselves who are living in poverty. A number of the girls described poverty not as an ongoing, or inescapable state, but as something that can be reversed with hard work.

*Women who live here are very needy and in very poor condition. They do not even have enough food supplies, no clothes to change and we see them like this. However I only have health problems, I have a good income, and I have great respect for God for giving me this chance.*

*I am not poor. If I were poor I could have sold local beer, tea, and household items through retailing and alleviate poverty.*

*Poverty is the lack of plan. In addition it is caused by absence of work habit. We must follow others who are working. If I work hard I get rid of poverty and become rich.*

*I will not be poor although I am woman. I can prepare different things to sell and improve my life.*

Many PEER participants expressed pride and belief in their ability to exercise control over their lives. For some, sense of self efficacy is intrinsically linked to their identity as female. Some girls spoke about ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’, a positive indication of change in the community.

*Because I am a woman, I can face any problem.*

*As long as I am a woman I can face poverty by making and selling cotton thread and local kitchen utensils like sefiet, baking injera for another household.*

*I am enjoying being woman because the rights of the woman are getting attention these days. I can perform what men are doing. For example I can remove weed, dig and clear unnecessary things from the farm land.*

*Empowerment process has started. For example, woman can organize themselves and stand for their rights and move for development activities.*

### 3.1.1 EDUCATION

Women in Lay Armachiho are generally less educated than their male counterparts. The predominant belief is that girls should stay at home and learn household skills while male children attend formal education.

*I was not able to attend my education as they sent the male children and put me in the house to work with my mother.*

*In some places only if the first child is a girl she goes to school but if another child is a boy he will be the one going to school instead.*

*My family did not see education as necessary for woman as she will get married and stay home. They believe the saying that education will not take a woman far, because she belongs in the kitchen.*

These harmful beliefs are exacerbated by the (perceived) lack of employment opportunities in the region.

Girls usually drop out of school when they reach grade 5 to 8. The community believes that since the students who finish earlier do not have job, the other students who come behind them don’t have hope to get job. Therefore, they encourage the girls to get married.

*Girls start attending education but they usually stop at grade 6 because the community thinks there is no point continuing as girls will not find job after they finish.*

Parents also disallow their adolescent daughters from staying in school fearing that they will become pregnant before they get married, bringing shame to the family. Families fear that at school, and travelling there and back, girls have increased exposure to men and boys, making them more likely to become sexually active than girls who remain at home.

*School is a very good place to lose your virginity and the majority of girls have lost their virginity in school. They are happy to practice sex. The average age would be 15 to have sex if you are not married. There is no peer pressure; it is the mutual interest of the girl and boy.*

*Just this week a high school student had a baby outside marriage - she gave birth and left the baby in the street. Now she is in prison.*

The girls themselves believe strongly in the benefits of education. Some of the girls were able to give positive examples where girls were able to continue going to school. However, the stories they told tended to be about ‘other girls’, rather than themselves.

*After I finish my school and I will look for a job. I believe education has many benefits.*

*I have never been to school. I always blame my parents for not sending me to school. If I had a chance to go to school, I could have a better life now.*

*Those girls who can get support from their family are attending their education. There are also girls who are supporting their family after they finish schooling and have got job.*

*Currently girls are attending their education and parents are willing to send their daughters to school because they are happy to see them taking care of and managing themselves.*

**Even for girls who are allowed to remain in school, completing their education is a constant challenge, as they lack support and are overburdened with household chores and responsibilities.**

*Even when we are sitting in class our head is not in class, it is thinking about all the housework to do.*

*Women are expected to shoulder many responsibilities in the house. She will be busy in order to fulfil her parents' expectations. As a result of this she fails to attend her education and scores lesser grades. She prepares food to the family, washes their clothes and cleans the house.*

*In the rural area girls have lesser chance to attend their education as a result of being overburdened in the house.*

*Girls in this area attend their education but they usually fail to pass the 10th grade. If I had someone to support me I would have been successful and lead good life.*

*Girls are weak in education. They give up. They have a low level of involvement in school and they have weak thoughts. They don't put their hand up to ask questions. They are not as confident like the boys in class. They have their head elsewhere.*

**Many of the PEER participants felt poverty could explain why so many girls are removed from formal education.**

*As a result of the poverty in this area, girls are discouraged to finish their education.*

*I had a strong interest to continue my education although I was not able to cover my school expense like buying exercise books, pen and pencil only with the income I rose from selling fire wood.*

*The community wants that the young people go to school but if there is no money then they need to bring income.*

**What is clear is that all of these factors are closely related. Poverty, tradition, gender inequality, limited access to education and lack of paid employment are intrinsically linked to each other and, as shown in the following section, child marriage.**

## 3.2 CHILD MARRIAGE

Despite it being illegal, all of the PEER participants were married before they turned 18. They also gave examples of girls in their communities who were engaged from their infancy. This demonstrates the challenges in enforcing existing laws at the local level.

*I was married when I was 12 years old. I knew nothing. When they told me that I was going to marry I did not say anything.*

*I was only 7. My family thought I was young, but my in-laws said they will raise me and my husband will not sleep with me until I was 10 years old.*

*I got married when I was 10. I stayed four years in my parents place and one year in my in-laws place. I started my own life (with my husband) when I was 15. I gave birth after one year.*

*I was married at the age of 13. I stayed with my in-laws for two years. I gave birth to a baby when I was about 15 years old. Now I have five children.*

*The typical age to be married in our area is 14 or 15. Some get married later, but the majority get married at a young age.*

*Some people arrange an engagement for their daughters during christening (i.e. on 40th day after birth).*

**The age difference between the girls and their husbands varies, but typically girls spoke of marrying men about 10 years older than themselves. This age gap and the associated power differentials have a negative impact on girl's independence and decision-making ability.**

*Men are usually 8 to 11 year older than the girls they are marrying.*

*We see age difference is 9 to 11 years between men and girls. For example 14 and 25. Boys mostly do not get married until they are in their middle 20s.*

*The age gap between my husband and I is great. We don't think alike so we argue a lot.*



**PEER researchers gather to help compile the data collected in interviews**

*Since most of them have big age gap with their husbands, they do not love each other.*

**Girls who are married at a very young age are sometimes considered too young to enter sexual relationships straight away. In these circumstances, families make an agreement whereby the child bride remains with her family or in-laws until she is considered old enough.**

*Usually, if girls are married young they do not start the marriage relationship until after a few years. I was married at 10 and I lived with my parents for five years and one year with my in laws. When I was 16, my husband and I got our house.*

*First she will stay with his family for one year and then she will come back to her family for one year. Because her body is not ready for sex so she lives with her husband's mum and dad and she comes back to her home to prevent unnecessary sex in this early age. There is fear from the girl that she will have to have sex on her wedding night but in fact usually there is a signed agreement between the two families - until age 15. This is common. The majority of families sign this agreement.*

*Once a girl is married off, she starts living with her husband and her in-laws so she will learn to differentiate the useful from the harmful. She will get used to her husband's behaviour, making her life easier. It is also made so she won't have children too soon. The agreement is good for women because it protects them from sex until the assigned time.*

**Unfortunately for some girls, however, the agreement is not always kept and families are not often in a position to enforce these agreements.**

*I was married at 12 but it was agreed that we would not have sex until I was 18. But my husband did not keep the agreement. He wanted to break the agreement and start to live together when I was 15 and started having sex. He discussed with family and community members. I was not happy about interruption of school.*

**It is very uncommon for girls to have any choice regarding when or to whom they get married. Generally the parents or elders of the family make the decision for her.**

*First the groom's family ask a girl's family for her hand in marriage. Second the parents decided whether they want to give her away or not.*

*First my parent's permission was asked. Second my husband's socio-economic status and ancestral lineage was assessed. Third some clothing was bought for me, and then he married me.*

*Either a neighbour or a family member starts looking for a husband for me. Once a man asks my father for my hands in marriage, my father and mother make a decision after they consulted with family.*

*I had no idea about marriage when my dad was asked for my hand; I was 10. My dad consulted with the family and they agreed to marry me off.*

*Parents will prepare everything and then right at the last week just before the ceremony they will tell her. They will not tell her early because otherwise she may run away from home or make some bad decisions.*

**In contrast, a man may be involved in choosing his own wife. This is especially common when the man is older and has already been living an independent life.**

*I didn't know my husband before we got married but he saw me. He came to my family to ask if our families were related at all. Everyone always asks this. Then he sent his family to ask for my hand in marriage. He was 20 years old and I was 14.*

**The payment of a 'bride price' is central to the marriage agreement. Girls spoke of an "excessive" bride price being given by the husband's family in the form of money, gold, gifts and the wedding party itself.**

*After the proposal they will go two or three times to bring gold or something to her parents and then receive the response. Then the marriage will be arranged. He needs to buy clothes, shoes, and an umbrella and prepare for the wedding party.*

*The wedding party is expected to be a lavish event. Even poor families entertain hundreds of guests on these important days.*

*When the wedding day draws to a close, there is preparation of barley, washing and drying, to make home-made alcohol called tella. Vegetables necessary to cook food with are also bought and one cow is slaughtered. On the day of the wedding, the groom goes to the girl's house with his family and friends. After the elders of the family bless the groom and the bride, the food is served and music will play. Then the groom takes his bride.*

*The wedding will be celebrated with two or three thousand people. Two oxen will be slayed and eaten and the people will stay there and celebrate for a whole week.*

### **3.2.1 CHILD BRIDES' EXPLANATIONS FOR CHILD MARRIAGE**

**The PEER participants spoke in detail about why they and other girls in their community are married at such a young age. The reasons, multiple and interrelated, are outlined in this section.**

## **TRADITIONAL PRACTICES, PRIDE AND HONOUR**

Most of the 'reasons' or 'causes' mentioned in the interviews are associated with firmly held traditional beliefs and practices, constantly reinforced by girls' parents and other community members. These beliefs and practices mean that marrying children young is an aspirational social norm.

*Parents are happy to marry off any of their daughters whose hands have been asked for marriage. People think that girls who are married young are pretty girls or girls with good skills in the domestic sphere.*

*It is simply an honour for parents to marry off their girls at a young age.*

*It is a compliment, or honour to marry your daughter young. It is the sign of a girl who is sought after.*

In contrast, it is seen as an embarrassment or 'disgrace' for families when they do not marry their daughters young. Those girls who are not 'chosen' early are looked down upon and 'abused' by the community.

*Most, like me, get married before they reach the age of 15. Once a girl passes 15, she is insulted by the community and her family is defamed; they say her chances of being single for all her life is great.*

*If a girl is not married between 10 and 12, she will defame her family, because people will say the girl must not have been raised well, and with feminine traits. No one will want to be with the girl neither; they are abused by society. They are called names such as whores, tree (implying that they have no use) and more.*

## **PROTECTING VIRGINITY TO UPHOLD FAMILY HONOUR**

Preserving family honour by marrying girls as virgins is central to the tradition of child marriage. Girls 'spoiled' by pre-marital sex, are not desirable wives, and bring shame to the girl's family. The PEER participants explained how this logic is used to justify child marriage.

*Child marriage happens because people believe that the girls will be "spoiled" if they are not married at an early age, in that they will be whores and become pregnant outside of marriage. The parents do not want to be defamed.*

*For the girls who get married later, it is a real risk that she will have sex before marriage. Her parents have not confirmed their boyfriend so they go off and have sex with them.*

*By 15 or 16 years old they start having sex at school. And so to protect the family dignity the parents will marry the girls before this. If people hear another girl is having sex outside marriage they will quickly arrange to have their own daughter married.*

*The parents fear that the girls will leave their chastity, become whores and get pregnant with illegitimate child. So they marry them off and constrain the girls to the kitchen.*

*Parents believe their daughter should be married, in holy ceremony, before she loses her holy and cleanness [virginity].*

This is further exacerbated by the belief that a girl's virginity is seen as a 'trophy' for the husband to win.

*The boys want early marriage, because they want to get the virgin bride.*

*For men it is an honour to marry a child, because they say 'we got her clean and in her innocence'.*

A few mentioned the 'virginity celebration' still occurring, where friends of the groom dance around the bloodied sheet in the morning.

*If the girl is more than 15 then they may celebrate the virginity with the dancing around the blood and the sheet.*

*There is a ceremony here the day after the wedding ceremony - they will show the sheet with the blood and dance with it. In the morning, he discusses with his friends, he tells them that he has taken her virginity and shows them the sheet or the t-shirt and then they enjoy and dance.*

Child marriage is also perceived to be a way to 'protect' girls from sexual abuse and rape.

*Parents give their daughter to husband because they think that she might face sexual abuse when she moves around to fetch water or collect fire wood. But once she got married she is free from this problem.*

*My school was so far away from my house, it was across a river. My parents married me off fearing something bad will happen to me, like getting raped, on my way to school.*

## **ECONOMIC SECURITY AND LACK OF OTHER OPTIONS**

Child marriage is also perceived to be a way out of poverty. Marrying girls young means that families are able to benefit from the bride price payment and 'hand over' the financial responsibility of their daughter to another family earlier.

*My marriage was arranged; because my family was poor, my parents thought that if we marry her off with a rich family, she will be better off and look after us too.*

*Girls are married off due to financial circumstances. A poor family for example will marry off their daughters fast so they can get the bride price money to feed their other children.*

**Many PEER participants felt that child marriage takes place because of an absence of other viable options for girls in their communities.**

*When I lost my parents I had no chance other than go to marriage at the age of 15 because I am female and not capable to support myself.*

*Marriage is arranged due to the pressure from the parents especially when they fail to send their daughter to school. The girls sometimes become obliged to marry when they don't have even enough to eat. It is the absence of choice that the girls want to marry. If we can get the chance it is much better attending our education.*

*While I was attending my education my father died. After this time my mother was not able to support me to continue my education. So she has given me to a husband. Currently I am living with my husband being as a home wife.*

*When I become 8 year old girl, my mother passed away. I joined school at the age of 10. As I failed to live with my step mother, I got married and stopped my education.*

*I was not interested to get married but my father had died and my other relatives push me into getting married because there was no support at the home.*

## **CHILD MARRIAGE TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

**Another common reason given for child marriage is a parent's desire to 'link' their family to another family. This is particularly true in cases where it has the potential to improve a family's financial position or social standing.**

*My family decided to marry me after assessing my husband's family socio-economic status and ancestral lineage. My family wanted to be related to my husband's family, so they married me off.*

*In my case, my family pressured my dad to marry me off at such a young age to a family he did not like, because my husband's family were rich and from a good family lineage.*

*I got married as part of a tradition known as 'my child for your child', my parents agreed and demanded to have a blood relation with my husband's family but I said I needed to learn but my father told me not to defy his will and then I could not go against my parent's wishes.*

**Marrying girls to a priest is also a way of gaining respect, and is even seen to serve the family beyond death. This is especially problematic as priests 'must marry a virgin' due to the belief that, 'if the wife is not a virgin then he himself is not a priest'. As a result, priests commonly marry the youngest brides.**

*The priest is limited to a 10 year old bride.*

*For the priests, the average age of wife is about 10 and for the others the average age is about 15.*

*A girl who is supposed to be married at earliest age is one who is given to a priest because of the fact that she must be a virgin. In addition to this, her parents think that the priest will serve them while they die. They think that if they reject their marriage question, the priests will not be willing to give them spiritual service and a priest is a respected person in the community.*

## **SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY TRADITIONS**

**Many PEER participants explained that their parents wanted to marry their daughters young to ensure their grandchildren would be born while they were still alive. The girls mentioned a common local saying: 'have a child while you are still a child', which illustrates this.**

*There is a belief that girls have to pay back their parents' favour of raising her, by showing them grandchildren.*

*The very reason is that parents are eager to see their children having their own home and kids while they are alive.*

## **GIRLS' CHOICE**

**Occasionally girls choose to get married at a young age hoping it will improve their quality of life.**

*Sometimes girls also are part of the decision and do choose it for themselves. I attended my high school education at another school until grade 10. But I was not able to score the pass mark to go to the next level and stop attending school. After this time I was employed in a construction and worked for two years. But after this time I was not able to resist the requests to marriage and decided to marry hoping that I would get better life.*

### 3.2.2 THE IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE ON GIRLS' LIVES

Some of the PEER participants believed that being married young has a positive impact on the lives of girls and their families.

*I have an honour in my community as a married woman. My father always thanks me for making him proud in his community, also for expanding our social circles.*

*I do not think child/early marriage have that much negative impact. For example, I got married when I was 14 and I think that marrying at early age is very exciting and respectful. Because it is a taboo if a girl is not married young, she will be given a nickname called 'kumo ker' and considered as a prostitute.*

*Girls say child marriage is good. If we can't get job after we finish school we prefer to marry and have our own home not to spend much time in search of job and being late to marriage. Girls think that when they get married their family become satisfied and they can lead good life also.*

*I married a rich man with good behaviours, he neither parties nor drinks. Thus our relationship is good. My in-laws are very nice and helpful. They look after my kids when I go to the city centre, or encourage and guide me with wise words.*

*Thanks to God! My life is very good. I got married at the age of 14 and gave birth at 17. My child is 2 years old. I am 19 years old. Currently I am in a better position in life.*

*Life for me is comfortable here. Because no one blames and pushes you here. I live my own life I am independent from my family. I am independent from my family because I am married.*

*I was married when I was 15 and I lived in my in-laws place for three years and then after started my own life. I gave birth after one year. I had no pain when I gave birth. I live with my in-laws and husband peacefully. I am very comfortable with my life style.*

**Other girls simply accepted the reality of child marriage as normal and inevitable as a result of their situation and the lack of alternative options for girls.**

*I didn't go to school and was married off at age 10. Then I stayed three years at my parents' house, then I started my own life and after 2 years I had one child. She is now a one year old baby. Even if I didn't get enough education and was married off I live very smoothly with no hard work.*

*I was married before I start education. Then I stayed 3 years with my parents and 1 year with my in-laws and then I started my own life. I gave birth after 2 years. Now I have a one-year-old boy. So far, my life is comfortable. I sell Gesho for living and my husband contributes.*

The relationship between a bride and her husband and in-laws is a critical factor in how child marriage impacts a girl's life. This is particularly true if the bride lives with her parents-in-law. Some of the PEER participants gave positive examples.

*Some say they have a good relationship with their husbands, meaning they work together and in peace to advance their living situation.*

*My relationship is good; we have everything we need so there is nothing we argue about. My husband and I have a good relationship with our in-laws. We help each other in bad times and share happiness.*

*I have a good relationship with my in-laws; my mother in-law encourages, guides and supports me.*

*I lead a comfortable life with my husband and my in-laws. We help each other with everything.*

**Others, however, had a much less positive experience.**

*They quarrel with each other every time she leaves the home and if her Mother and/or father-in-law have negative attitude towards her. During this time they tell their son different bad things about his wife, which results in clash between them.*

*They usually tell to him (their son) what she (his wife) did during the day time. They insist he leaves her to marry another girl saying that the girl is not being respectful to his management. As a result he starts beating her because of the advice he received from his parents*

*His parents are also insisting him to expel her if she is not able to give birth as they want to see grandchild. They said to him that he is feeding a mule. Therefore he usually gives choice either to give birth or leave the house. Then she will leave the house.*

**Many of the PEER participants explained how child marriage forced them to deal with adult issues 'before they are ready', making many regret their 'lost childhood'.**

*No girl should be a child bride.*

*Early marriage makes girls hate the fact that they are born a woman.*

*Being a child bride makes us go through things, like having sex, being pregnant and giving birth, before our time. Thus it is stressful. We miss our parents.*

*It is very difficult to be a mother when you are a child yourself.*

*I don't know my childhood and I become a mother without playing like a child and this has affected me so much. I became a wife and a mother and raising a child is so expensive normal costs such for food, cloth and medication and when the child reaches for education the cost will include those for books, uniform wear and pen are really difficult to cover.*

## **EDUCATION AND POTENTIAL OF GIRLS**

**For most if not all the PEER participants, child marriage interrupted their education and many felt it had also hindered their future.**

*I miss school. I feel sorry that I failed to continue my education. I thought that life would have been easier if get married. But the fact is not like that.*

*I dropped out of the school because I got married at early age. Then I give birth. Even after I give birth I planned to go back to school but my husband and the villagers told me to stay at home.*

*I used to get very good marks at school but since they told me that I am going to get married as soon as I finish my school, I couldn't concentrate and my grades became very low. So my parents have been summoned to my school and were told to encourage me to study. But this only enhanced the plan of the marriage. I was married off before I finished my school.*

*I was not able to attend my education as they send the male children and put me in the house to work with my mother. At the age of 15 I got married. If I were able to get the opportunity to go to school like my brothers I would have had better life today. My parents also regret their action.*

*Early marriage leads us astray from our goals in life; it constrains us.*

*I did not go to school but if I had I would know better about hygiene and I would know how to take care for my child's health. It makes me feel mad to think I wasn't able go to school and become a better person.*

**In some cases, during the negotiations that precede marriage, the husband's family agrees to support the girl to finish her education, even once she is married. However, commonly this promise is not kept.**

*At the beginning the husband usually pledges to send his wife to school and take care of her. But after the marriage he doesn't keep his promise.*

*I got married at the age of 12. My husband pledged that he would help me to continue my education. He helped me get education until sixth grade. After this time he refused to send me back to school.*

*My husband pledged to send me to school but after the marriage he refused to send me to school and ordered me to look after my home. Currently I am in a marriage and not attending my education.*



PEER participants caring for their children

Despite parents' hopes that child marriage will secure their daughter's future, it often does the exact opposite. The PEER participants described child marriage as pulling them 'downwards' and fuelling the cycle of poverty.

*Early marriage pulls you downwards.*

*Women are backward because we got married and have kid at early age.*

*Currently those who don't have enough money and go to marriage are leading difficult life as their pocket usually run out of money.*

*Because I had my baby before I got secured job, it is now difficult to apply for jobs as it is difficult to go to interviews whilst carrying my baby.*

*I feel like my growth has been downward. I lost my passion for school.*

## **HEALTH IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE**

In addition to inhibiting girls' potential and preventing them from attending school, child marriage has a physical impact on young girls. Many PEER participants described how the stress of marriage affected their health.

*After we are married off and taken to our in-laws house, we lose our comfort. We don't eat as we used to or have the confidence to execute things we know how to do.*

*When a girl gets married at early age she is exposed to many problems. She loses weight.*

*Being a child bride makes us go through things before our time. Thus it is stressful. We miss our parents. We are not comfortable to eat as much as we can in our husband's household.*

Child brides suffer poor maternal health and stories of difficult pregnancies and life threatening complications during child birth were common among the PEER participants.

*My parents valuing the saying 'have a child in childhood' made me a child's mother too young and I was forced to face different health problems.*

*For men it is a pride to marry a child, but for women, we could lose our children or get obstetric fistula because we are young. And all this could make our husbands to leave us.*

*Child marriage is bitter and mean. I faced so many issues being a child bride. I was 12 when I got married and 17 when I had my first baby. Childbirth was painful for me, I had to go to the hospital and have a caesarean section. My child did not survive. I got pregnant again at 19, and gave birth to my second child who is 1 years old now, with a caesarean section.*

*Because of the early marriage, one of the girls in our community has had uterine prolapse. Her uterus is out. She has already had 2 babies and when she had her third it came out.*

*My first pregnancy was very difficult because the pain was atrocious. For instance, I used to have headaches; my appetite got lost and experience stomach aches. When I gave birth I experienced difficulties, I gave birth by surgery and after the surgery although the doctors saved my life they could not save my child's life.*

*A girl I knew from my village, she married very young and became pregnant soon after the man took her 'kibre nitsihina' (virginity). But she lost her baby when she was five months pregnant and became very ill as she lost lots of blood.*

*My parents allowed someone to marry me at the age of 13. After we spent two years together I became pregnant. I gave birth when I was 16. During this time I encountered health problems because of the slenderness of my womb. Then I was forced to give birth with the help of doctors through operation.*

*The pregnancy was ok but the birth of my baby was very bad. So much blood flowed out I was unconscious for several hours.*

*The problems I faced while I gave birth mean I will face complications in future births because I am affected by fistula.*

## **DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Child brides commonly experience violence at the hands of their husbands.

*Sometimes their husbands beat their wives to make them obedient and even stay with them. The girls have to respect their in-laws and be obedient toward them.*

*My husband is a drunkard and because of that he does not work according to the normal work hours and so he does not get the money he needs and he always comes home drunk and beats me.*

Many of the child brides also shared their experiences of sexual violence, and the negative physical implications resulting from having sex at a young age and before they felt ready.

*I was sick and could not move for a week when I lost my virginity.*

*I honestly think sex is the greatest struggle I have ever seen in my life. I felt like I bled a gallon when he did it to me first time. I was in so much pain for two weeks. It is painful in general.*

*I bleed and get bruised during intercourse because he does it without my will.*

*Child marriage is something done without much consideration to all the problems that the girls will face being married. They do not recognize the girls will face lots of pain during sexual intercourse or childbirth, because they are married before they are ready.*

*The girls say they don't have any desire for intercourse. But the men don't care, so they make their wives suffer.*

**Consequently, the child brides experienced ongoing dislike and even 'dread' of sex with their husbands. These quotes also highlight the feelings of shame they experience, and the negative influence sex has on their relationships with their husbands and other men in the community.**

*I hate sex entirely. It even makes me hate him after he has done it.*

*Since I got married at a young age when we were in bed I used to refuse to take my clothes off and my husband used to demand I turn my face towards him when we slept and so I used to wish there was no such thing as sex in marriages.*

*Whenever we have sex I feel so ashamed and hurt as we have sex against my will. Since I feel like my husband will beat me I will not refrain from his actions to have sex. And in the next morning my whole body will hurt. This has made me to hate other men as well. I don't even want to even see or talk to men as I always I have sex without my will. This has also made me to hate my husband, the relation I have with him is not on the correct path.*

*I can't even bare the name of it; I hate sex. My husband pressures me to do it though. After we do it, I am in pain and I can't bear the sight of my husband. He doesn't understand my pain.*

*Even the word sex disgusts me because I started sex when I was too young. My husband insists very much so I had to do it even though I don't enjoy it. I feel pain most of the time and the next morning, after we had sex, I feel very embarrassed to see him. I feel pain around my lower abdomen so this makes me hate my husband so much and is creating a gap between us.*

**Furthermore, for many of the PEER participants the fears of sex were made worse by their terror of becoming pregnant.**

*The doctor told me I was pregnant I really got scared and I panicked.*

*When I was nine month pregnant, I got really scared, I could not control myself and have a good night sleep.*

*The girls are fearful of labour; they compare it to being burned with flames.*

## **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIS)**

**A number of PEER participants mentioned child marriage is beneficial in its potential to protect them from sexually transmitted infections.**

*Since they are young, marriage will protect them from diseases.*

*Because I am limited to one person, I am protected from contracting STIs.*

*Early marriage protects the girl from STIs like HIV.*

*Child marriage prevents girls from contracting any disease, because a girl is married before she knows anything. If both the bride and the groom are young, it is good.*

**However, some PEER participants explained that child marriage could increase women's risk of contracting STIs, for example if their husband had previous sexual partners, or if he had other sexual partners while married.**

*These days the husband could be a widower so that is a risk (in terms of STIs).*

*Girls worry about HIV. If the husband is waiting outside in the night, the wife feels fear and fights with her husband because of HIV.*

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE**

**This PEER study has shed light on the profound psychological and emotional impact child marriage can have on young girls.**

*I did not feel happy to get married. My family forced me to get married.*

*The girl does not feel happy when she finds out she must get married, she does not feel happy or comfortable, she will cry.*

*When girls are sent off to their husband's houses, they are blindfolded. They cry a lot because they are young.*

**In some cases, girls are so unhappy they run away to escape marriage.**

*My family arranged the wedding but I refused and ran away.*

*Because I was young, my husband was not allowed to sleep with me until I reached 12. When I turned 12 my in-laws told me to move to his house, but I did not want to so I ran away home.*

**The child mothers who took part in this PEER spoke with regret about being taken from their parents' 'loving home' while they were still a child.**

*I miss home and my family.*

*Being married off at young age took me away from my parents' love and childhood games.*

*I am missing my parents' loving home.*

**In contrast, some PEER participants shared their feelings of resentment towards their parents and families for forcing them into marriage before they are ready.**

*My parents' wish for me was to get married and have children before they die but I really wanted to finish my school, get my own job and marry whoever I wanted. At some point, I had to leave their house and live with my friends, which is not easy at all. It affected my relationship with my parents.*

*If I had not been married but had had the chance to go to school I would have had better life than I have today. Therefore, I always blame my parents.*

**In addition to losing their trust and faith in their 'old' family, many child brides feel ongoing resentment towards their new husband and his family.**

*Because the girl is married without her will, she has bad feeling toward her husband. She is not comfortable and is in fear during intercourse.*

*At an early age, before I could play enough with my friends and without knowing what's good or bad I am leading my life according to my husband's interest. It makes me really unhappy. I cannot talk freely. I am beaten by my mother-in-law and raised without my freedom.*

**Many PEER participants shared their feelings of being controlled by or 'under' their husband and his family. Some shared how they felt more like a house servant than a wife.**

*Women are under their husbands while they are living in marriage.*

*Sometimes if the husband sees his wife while talking through mobile phone, he will give her warning not to do that again. He will tell her to live only with him and if she doesn't want to do that he will expel her.*

*A girl's right in the marriage is not respected as she is continuously told to be quiet because she is woman.*

*I was married when I was 9 years old. When I was living with my in-laws for five years, I was forced to wash my in-laws' legs, to work a work that I never tried and I was worried. I was told to raise someone's child.*

*As a result of the absence of persons who teach and advise them, many child brides become separated and lead difficult life going here and there. Because of the failure to discuss and solve their problems, they usually lead their life under their husband dominant management.*

*Some will live without ever tasting love.*

**Many of the PEER participants explained how the feeling of being 'trapped' against their will had a negative impact on their attitude to marriage, and relationship with their husband.**

*Being expected to fulfil a wife's role at such a young age has an emotional toll on the girl. It makes her lose her value for marriage. Though the husband is respectful and faithful, she doesn't trust him.*

*If the husband is educated he gives his wife a due respect. The women feel that they would have had better life if they were able to continue their education instead of marriage. Therefore, they don't have a good attitude to their marriage.*

**Commonly, the PEER participants explained that child marriage had affected their confidence and self-esteem. Some felt 'inferior' to their friends who had not been married as children.**

*The disadvantage of early marriage is that I feel like I have grown to be inferior of my friends.*

*Before she has an idea about herself, she has a kid to take care of. Also she feels discomfort in asking her family for help. She doesn't have a good relationship with her husband. This leads to her having low self-esteem and low confidence in herself.*

*Since I am married off before I know myself, I have low self-esteem and confidence. I have bad thoughts and lack interest in doing the house chores. My interest for school has gone down.*

## **SOCIAL IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE**

**For some of the PEER participants, marriage had had a positive impact on their social lives and position in society.**

*Being married at early age helped me to be independent from my family; it helped me to meet various people and build my social life.*

*I am respected in my community as a married woman.*

*The good part is that I am no longer dependent on my family. It has allowed me to meet with different kinds of people; my social circle has expanded. I have learned how to handle life.*

*The social life is very good. I have a good connection with my neighbours and family. We have coffees every now and then. We help each other during funerals and sickness. I am involved with the community-based shares.*

*The advantages of early marriage for me is it has opened me up to learn more works at home for instance preparing tella and welcoming different guests that come home and the different skills on baking injera. Additionally, I have learned skills on household management and learning to live with people with so many behaviours.*

**Unfortunately, however, child marriage has resulted in isolation for many girls. The PEER participants spoke about feeling ‘trapped’ inside their house, with no freedom to move around.**

*Marriage is like a prison. I am not allowed to go anywhere do whatever I like to do and have time with friends*

*We are not allowed to leave our house without the permission of our husband.*

**As well as being physically isolated, many PEER participants shared their feelings of loneliness. In addition to being forced away from their families, schoolmates and childhood friends, the child brides felt they were not mature enough to ‘fit in’ with older married women.**

*Learning that her friends are out having fun depresses her.*

*Socially she tries to fit in by doing everything the older people do in her community. However, she can't, as there will be a gap of experience. So she gets emotionally hurt and starts constraining herself from any social events.*

*Most of the people in my community are older than me. I am scared of them and uncomfortable with them.*

*In terms of social life, for example if there is lekso I feel very embarrassed to go as most of the women are very much older than me. I can't stay at home as it is a social taboo.*

*Even if I got married in my early ages there is no one that supports me, apart from my parents there is no one who would at least see how I am doing even if I spend days starved.*

**Some PEER participants even felt that as child brides they were ostracised, insulted and teased by their community.**

*They (child brides) don't get involved with social life, like with community shares and meetings.*

*I have become inferior to my friends. I have become an out-cast from the society.*

*Because of my marriage people talk about me when they are drinking coffee. They say 'is she even old enough to have got married let alone hold a child, what has happened to her?' When I do not go to those occasions, people will complain saying she did not come because she does not respect us.*

*My peers in the village used to insult me saying 'that girl who married her father...' they stigmatized me when I tried to sit with them. After I got married, I didn't know how to make injera so everyone including my husband used to tease me by saying 'are you considered as a woman?' This made me feel very stressed and frustrated.*

*Child marriage has hurt me a lot. My friends and neighbours of my childhood community swear at me saying 'oh look at her, she got married and do nothing else'.*

### 3.2.3 CHILD MOTHERHOOD

**Child motherhood and the associated complications were a recurring theme throughout the research. A number of the participants were mothers and many shared their fears their young age influenced their ability to raise their children.**

*It is very difficult to be a mother when you are a child yourself. I was very shocked when I found out that I was pregnant because I was concerned with the future, whether I can manage to raise her up properly or not. One day I was alone with the baby and she had become very ill. I didn't know what to do so I started crying.*

*I feel so sad that I am a child mother. I am not free anymore. Raising a child is difficult, and I am not well trained for it. Every time my child loses weight or looks darker I am so scared.*



**PEER participant with her daughter**

*I was so worried about how I was supposed to raise my child. Once my daughter got sick and my husband wasn't around. She got really weak and since I did not know what to do I just sat beside her and cried. Then I started screaming for help, people came and said it was her throat that was bothering her. So they cut out her tonsils, my daughter felt better the next day. This wouldn't have happened if I was mature enough to know how to keep my daughter clean and what to feed her.*

*When my child is sick, I feel very scared and I can't sleep. There is a belief that if you leave a child alone, he will be exposed to different diseases so I can't leave my child and go to work. Because I didn't manage to hold her properly, she hurt her back so I had to take her to a traditional healer. It is not easy to have a child.*

### 3.2.4 DIVORCE

In Amhara, divorce is perceived to be something 'bad', and avoided at all costs. Obtaining a divorce is also difficult and complex forcing girls to stay in difficult marriages.

*If a girl is unhappy in her marriage it is difficult for her to leave because she must pay 3-5000 birr to get out of the agreement. This is the same amount that he paid in bride price.*

However, there were stories of couples who had got divorced.

*Divorce is very common in this area. Sometimes the women leave the man and sometimes it is the other way round.*

*I was married off when I was 7 years old. My husband was not allowed to sleep with me until I was 10, so I lived with my in-laws. After the three years, my in-laws broke the engagement and let me go home because I was not good at conducting the domestic chores. So I got divorced and enrolled in school.*

*My husband pledged to send me to school but he refused to do that later on. When he refused to do that I got divorced and continued my education.*

*I am not leading good life as my parents gave me to someone at the age of 16. I was living with my husband who pledged to send me to school. We were quarrelling every time. My parents were not able to send me to school after grade 7. Finally we got divorced and I have started living alone and working as a daily labourer.*

Because of the stigma associated with divorce, and the position of women in the community, broken marriages leave many girls living alone and raising children with no support

*We are divorced and I live alone taking care of my daughter. Life is difficult for me. I prepare and sell local beer and tea and local alcohol. If it sells I live well. Sometimes it does not sell and then life is difficult for me.*

*If a girl is not happy in her marriage she can divorce him. But people in the community will think she is bad.*

*My husband is not willing to pay any child support, because he wants to take my kids away from me. Now we have been divorced for 6 years and I am living a difficult life as laundress and cook.*

*After I gave birth we divorced. I was not able to go out to work because I had no one to take care of my child.*

## 3.3 IMPACT OF INITIATIVES TARGETING CHILD MARRIAGE

Many PEER participants believe 'things are already improving' for girls and perceive programmes addressing child marriage as having a positive impact. This evidence confirms that intervention programmes tend to focus on preventing or delaying child marriage, rather than improving the lives of married girls.

*Currently the situation is very much improved. Before, it was more difficult and girls were getting married even younger and expected to have sex. Previously it was common for girls at 12 and 13 to be married and having sex and now it is more common for 15.*

*Previously being female was difficult because we were abused by others unlike the current situation. Some of the problems were early marriage, physical punishment and being denied of education opportunity. Whereas currently being female is very good as we are succeeded to claim our rights such as attending education and we are free from early marriage and rape and abduction.*

*Two or three years ago early marriage was very common in this community. This has change and currently students are selecting each other and getting married after high school.*

*Now there is improvement and the majority of girls are in the school and their family are not interested in interrupting the girls' education.*

There were also a number of encouraging accounts of girls realising their rights with regards to their sexual and reproductive health. This may be a consequence of programmes aiming to empower girls, build their confidence, and improve their access to information.

*I want to wait until I am 25 to have a baby. I discussed this with my husband and he agreed.*

*My husband wants to have a baby but I refused. I want to wait two more years.*

*My husband works away from here so I have discussed with him that if he has sex outside of the marriage he will use a condom.*

*If the wife sees her husband with other girls she may ask him to do another HIV test. If he refuses she may interrupt the marriage with the help of her family and other community members.*

### 3.4 INFLUENCE OF LAWS PROHIBITING CHILD MARRIAGE

**Some PEER participants said their parents were aware and feared the law prohibiting marriage before the age of 18. Some girls even gave examples of the law being enforced, in some cases with mixed results.**

*Parents are afraid of the law. If they arrange wedding service for the young girl they will go to jail.*

*Parents fear that they will be arrested if the government or any NGO get involved.*

*It is the girl's parents that go to prison because the boy is already above the age.*

*There were two girls who were chosen to be priests' wives. The wedding programme was arranged outside in another town but the government officials heard about the situation and go to the place. They interrupted the service and took the family of the girl to prison. They stayed some weeks in prison and finally the court decided that they could pay a fine.*

*Once a Priest got married to a girl who was 10 years old. He was imprisoned for three years, but he ended up getting married to the same girl when she turned 18.*

**However, commonly parents are aware that child marriage is illegal but they find ways of keeping the marriage hidden. This gives some indication of the deep-rooted nature of child marriage as an aspirational social norm, and the problems associated with implementing the law.**

*Even if there is a law against child marriage, parents want to see the best life for their daughter.*

*Parents bribe the girls not to tell.*

*Only a small number of people are in prison for this. During the court process the girl is advised by her family to say that she loved him, to say that it is her interest to live with him. Because of this not many people are in prison.*

### 3.5 ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

**When asked about their access to information about child marriage, the child brides explained they had received some information about the relevant legislation as well as related sexual and reproductive health issues. They had received their information from a range of sources.**

*We learn in school that early child marriage is unnecessary and causes problems. Sometimes we hear in the community about people going to jail. Health extension workers and other government workers and in the church also they tell us about it. It is common to hear about it in the school. We have prepared drama in school about the bad things about early marriage.*

*I was told by my sister that if menstruation stops then there is pregnancy.*

*They learn in biology about reproduction and about what time of the month is the most fertile.*

*There is a youth association here in the town. They distribute condoms.*

**However, many had received little or no information about sex, pregnancy, childbirth or motherhood. Many of the issues surrounding child marriage, like sex, remain a taboo, so many child brides are unable to ask questions and raise concerns with their family and friends. Many PEER participants felt girls were going through major life stages without help or guidance and 'before girls know anything'.**

*We have no information at all about pregnancy, sex or childbirth. We practice it without any knowledge.*

*Most girls have no information about sex and pregnancy before they get married.*

*Before they know anything, they end up with unwanted pregnancies.*

*When a girl is a child bride, she is given the responsibility of leading her household before she knows how to be sanitary for herself. She has to take care of her children as a child herself.*

*Girls know so little about sex and pregnancy before they get married. I didn't realize that I was pregnant for five months.*

*They say that they have no desire for sexual intercourse and it is painful, especially because their husband are drunk and do not care for the girls. The girls have no one to talk about this with.*

**The significant lack of information and guidance available to girls means that commonly, myths and misunderstandings circulate amongst them unchecked.**

*Due to the hot temperature the society is affected with TB and also HIV. This could affect the child mothers' health.*

**During the PEER the participants were also asked about their access to services. There were some positive findings, particularly in relation to access to and use of contraception.**

*It is no problem for an unmarried girl to get family planning. Her parents would not know that she is using family planning and the nurse does not talk about it.*

*The majority of girls use contraception when they go to live with their husband because they fear the behaviour of their husband. If his behaviour is not good they would be able to prevent themselves from having a baby with him.*

*If she is not interested in having a baby, she starts to use contraception with the agreement of her husband. And if she wants to have a baby she stops using her contraception. Girls feel confident to go on their own to get family planning.*

**Another positive finding was that many of the PEER participants had had an HIV/AIDS test prior to marriage. It seems this has become a common step in the marriage agreement process and many girls first meet their future husbands while having their tests.**

*The first time I saw him was during the HIV counselling and testing.*

*Both the girl and the man go to nearby health service station and take HIV test.*

*It is very common to test for HIV before marriage. They will have the test and then come back after 3 months for the 2nd test.*

**However the PEER participants described somewhat inconsistent and variable access to health services for antenatal care and during child birth. They explained that generally, access to services in urban centres is better than in rural areas.**

*Nowadays, the girls go for antenatal care at the health facility and the health workers tell them to deliver at the clinic. It is no longer common for girls to deliver their babies at home.*

*In rural areas, it is common to have home delivery. In urban area they go to the clinic to have check-up. If everything is ok they can go home to deliver. If there are any problems they will deliver in the clinic. The family decide what the process will be, where she will deliver, she is not involved in the decision.*

*If the local traditional birth attendant is not a good one then the delivery is conducted at the health facility.*

*Majority of babies around here are born at home, but if there are difficulties they go to the health centre.*

**Some felt that services were lacking and/or inaccessible. Some also explained how younger girls experience particular difficulties when trying to access services and contraception.**

*Health extension workers immunise children and talk about keeping our hygiene but don't talk about sex or family planning and tell us about pregnancy.*

*The hospitals are very far away and there is a lack of professionals in the hospitals and the ones who are working there do not care for people and their country so many girls die prematurely.*

*Because I am too young, I fear that people will tease and mock me if I seek contraception.*

*There's no organization to help child mothers. There is shortage of resources in the city. Also people's morale is low. People just have talks without any action.*

**One girl even warned that due to the misappropriation of funds, even where various programmes exist, the money may not reach child brides and others in need.**

*There are issues of discrimination in our area for example, if the government starts a programme to support orphans, mostly it's the well-off family that benefits from it. When the government starts providing pens and exercise books for poor children and orphans, it's the children of the civil servant that benefit from it. Most of the time there is no chance for single mothers.*

## **3.6 GIRLS' ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS**

**The PEER participants were adamant that their daughters should not face the same fate as themselves. They shared their desire for their daughters to be educated, marry later and choose their own husbands.**

*Since the fact I did not get proper education really disappoints me, I will make my children go to school and earn proper education. I want my child to be a good student so I will buy the books which are needed for their education.*

*I would advise my daughter about HIV and other STIs. I would advise her to finish her school seriously. By providing this information and discussing with her I would help protect my daughter from pregnancy until she has finished school.*

*I have passed through so many difficult situations and I would not want to see my daughter going through this. I would like to see her finish her study and start working before she gets married. I would advise my girl and tell her about my own difficult situation and advise her to protect herself from sex until she gets married.*

*I don't want this life for my daughter. I will do everything I can to send her to school and then after she finishes I will help her to get married. If some other proposal comes in the meantime while she is still young I will not accept it.*

*I would hope my daughter would find her own husband. Even if she selects her own husband we should know about him before the marriage. My husband agrees with this. I do not want to see early marriage in the next generation.*

*If I had a daughter, I would want her to choose her husband. I would be so happy if she came to me and said she had found someone. I would discuss with my daughter, the fear of unwanted pregnancy. At the moment this is not easy for the unmarried girls to protect their virginity. There is no discussion with the family.*



**Daughter of one of the PEER participants**

## 4. BENEFITS OF PEER FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

A key advantage of PEER is the obvious benefits for the participants. The training, workshops, networking and interviews which make up PEER, allow the participants to develop their capacity, knowledge and skills. Working closely with girls like themselves, the previously marginalised child brides created new relationships, networks and communication channels.

*At first we all felt really scared because we have never been in a meeting before. Also the girls we interviewed felt very shy at the start talking about these issues they had not spoken about before but then they opened up and we all felt more confident.*

*We didn't know each other before, now we are a close group.*

*We have learned new skills: how to interview each other, and how to talk and to listen to others.*

*We have overcome our fear and lack of confidence. Our confidence and trust is built up.*

*I learned that other married girls are having children too young. I learned from them that I shouldn't have a baby until I am older - I learned the challenges through the other girls' stories.*

As shown by these quotes, the PEER has created a network of eloquent, empowered and confident child brides. Motivated by and committed to their role as 'experts' on child marriage, they requested involvement in any governmental or non-governmental initiatives tackling child marriage. The PEER participants were given the opportunity to make recommendations for programmes to address child marriage in the final PEER workshop.



Daughter of one of the PEER participants

## 5. GIRLS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the recommendations made by the PEER participants focussed on methods to prevent child marriage. However, as child brides themselves, they could give unique insights as to how to help girls 'already suffering' from child marriage. The recommendations they made are outlined below.

### CAPACITY BUILDING FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

The PEER participants highlighted the need for training and support for child mothers. They also mentioned their need for 'educated' people to provide them with support.

*During pregnancy and childbirth, mothers need a counselling on how to take care of their babies.*

*I would like to widen my knowledge of child development so that I can raise my child in a better way.*

*I would like to learn how to take care of my baby daughter. I would like to be educated and changed.*

*Educated persons should advise girls about issues like sex and childbirth... Counsel them.*

*I would also like to find someone who can provide me advice in information about child development.*

### INCREASED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND CONTRACEPTION

The need for improved access to health care and contraception was also a common theme. The PEER researchers highlighted the need for these services to be affordable, sensitive and appropriate.

*Some women have more children because they can't afford to buy contraception. So it would be good if there was a family planning centre in our area.*

*The youth association distribute condoms in the hotels and the pool/games centres but they are only boys. It would be good if girls were also involved. They are happy to get their information from an old person but for most old people their knowledge is not good. They want the information from a knowledgeable girl or woman.*

### VOCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES

The necessity for interventions to include vocational and economic support and opportunities was highly evident.

In some cases the participants voiced their desire for the training and opportunities necessary for them to enter paid employment. Others requested various forms of support, financial help or access to loans to enable them to start small businesses, or continue their education.

*What I want is to get back to school; which means I need someone who can look after my child when I go to school.*

*We would like job opportunities and economic initiatives, so we can develop ourselves.*

*The government should lend girls who have got divorced money so that they can make their own income. Also, we need the strong power of the law and government.*

*Because I am a mother at a young age, I would like to have secure job to earn money to support myself and my child. Because I haven't got enough money to start my own business, I do odd jobs at people's houses and I worry too much about how I am going to cope if something bad happens to me or my child? If I had money, there are so many things I could do. For example, I could bring oranges and bananas and sell them in my village; I could also sell tea with lime juice in my village.*

*Because house rent eats all of their money they earn, it would be good if they could get housing benefit. In addition, financial support would enable them to start their own work and become just like anybody else.*

*I would like to get advice and support on how to get a job and positively change myself as I need to better myself.*

### CREATE NETWORKS OR ASSOCIATIONS TO HELP CHILD BRIDES

The child brides highlighted the need for girls' clubs, networks or associations. They suggested that these groups should provide girls with information, counselling and training.

*We need a new office established to disseminate information about these issues. Girls do not listen to teachers or health workers; we need a new place to work on these issues.*

*It would be good if there is an organization to help those child brides and child mothers.*

*I feel like there should be organization for people in worse circumstances than me, like those having difficulty raising their children.*

Many of participant girls expressed their wishes to help young girls at risk. They offered to mentor and counsel other girls based on their own experiences.

*It would be good if there is a way that we can be role model for the younger girls.*

*We can share our experiences with other girls to help them. I would advise them from my hardship and not to get married at a young age. I would tell her intercourse is painful and giving birth is risky. I will tell her space out her pregnancies. I will tell her to keep sanitary and feed the baby periodically. I would say don't be like me, my life is not as successful as my friends. I have lost my freedom because I am responsible to my children.*

*The main cause of my difficult life is early marriage. I would like to make sure other girls did not have to have early marriage.*

## **SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING TO IMPROVE CONFIDENCE**

The necessity for counselling and support was a recurring theme, for example to help child mothers increase their confidence and capacity.

*Young married girls need care and moral encouragement. I want someone who understands my situation and help me.*

*Girls need psychological and technical training to improve their confidence. Boys get better marks in school than girls, but only because boys are more confident.*

*When child brides give birth they need verbal encouragement.*

*I would like to have someone who would encourage and council me on what is the best way for me to succeed.*

## **RELATIONSHIP ADVICE AND SUPPORT**

Some girls expressed their desire for advice and support to help them strengthen their relationships with their husbands, families and members of the wider community.

*We need training and life skill instructions on how to live with our husband, family and community peacefully.*



PEER participants at the stakeholder workshop

## **WORKING WITH FAITH LEADERS**

One participant also mentioned the potential of working with faith leaders, due to their influence on society.

*Most people now agree they want to avoid early marriage but still the problem happens with priests and some boys want to get married with young girls. It is difficult for the government to intervene with the priests as the religion is so much respected here but it is very important.*

## 6. CHILD MARRIAGE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME IN LAY ARMACHIHO, ETHIOPIA

Using the evidence from the PEER, a programme was designed to meet the practical and strategic needs of child brides in Lay Armachiho. This comprehensive intervention addresses a range of factors to improve the lived realities of child brides, including income generation, access to services and psychosocial support. Investing in these young women has created a group of eloquent, motivated and confident advocates for change who aim to undermine the social norms that underpin the continuation of child marriage. This programme is administered by ProFutures Development Initiative (PFDI) with technical support from FORWARD.

PFDI was established shortly after the PEER was complete, and is funded by the Sigrid Rausing Trust. In addition to a head office in Addis Ababa, PFDI has an office at the project site in South Gondar, where the Project Coordinator is based. The Project Coordinator is PFDI's only paid member of staff, the rest are volunteers. The details of PFDI's multifaceted approach to ending child marriage are below.

### **Psychosocial support through clubs and networks –**

Following three days of capacity building and leadership training administered by PFDI and FORWARD, the

PEER participants created a network. The 25 network members also participate in one of four smaller clubs, depending on where they live. The clubs meet monthly, providing members with a safe space in which they can share their concerns and ideas. Importantly, this enables girls to access support, which would otherwise be absent in their lives. The clubs also disseminate much needed training, services and information.

**Community education and advocacy –** With guidance and support from PFDI, the clubs and network engage with government officials, traditional leaders and community members. By sharing their personal experiences, the child brides shed light on the harmful aspects of child marriage, to change attitudes towards the practice. They complement this with educating others about relevant legislation and the rights of child brides and girls at risk of child marriage. The members of the girls' network also reach out to isolated child brides, to point them towards the appropriate services and support networks. The network members have become role models, champions and passionate advocates of ending the practice of child marriage in their community.

**Income generating activities –** In the first year of the project, FORWARD and PFDI provided the network of child brides with business skill and entrepreneurship training. This included training in bookkeeping, financial management, sales marketing and customer care. Consequently the child brides have started a cattle and dairy farming initiative and are depositing their earnings in a savings account. In addition to helping relieve poverty and vulnerability, the child brides have reported an improved capacity to take part in decision making both in the home and in the wider community.



*Members of a girls' club caring for their cattle*

**Partnerships and networking** – PFDI plays an invaluable role in helping the girls' clubs and network create partnerships with important stakeholders. This includes working with governmental actors at the district, regional and national levels. Furthermore, they have kick-started a mentoring scheme with the University of Gondar.

Despite these successes, PFDI has faced some challenges. Girls' participation in network activities is sometimes inconsistent due to their domestic responsibilities

and financial instability. In some cases girls have been prevented from attending meetings by their husbands and male family members. At times PFDI has a reduced capacity due to limited staffing and resources. However, a relatively young organisation, PFDI is making a positive move towards expanding and building their capacity to address these challenges and strengthen their interventions.



*Members of the child brides network in Lay Armachiho*

## 7. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

This PEER report has provided a unique insight into the lives of child brides living in Lay Armachiho District, Ethiopia. As well as outlining child brides' understanding of the causes of child marriage, this report has provided a rich and detailed account of how marriage affects young girls' day-to-day lives, and long term potential. The child brides who collected the data to inform these findings have created a network of confident and eloquent young women, whose recommendations have directly influenced FORWARD's interventions.

The recommendations provided here are based on the findings of the research, the feedback from the PEER participants in the final workshop, and the consultations with stakeholders that concluded the research. They also take into account learning from FORWARD and PFDI's child marriage intervention programme.

***Sensitive and culturally relevant approaches are crucial to responding to child marriage.*** Child marriage is a key part of the social identity in communities where it is practised. Acknowledging this will build trust and relationships with communities, helping to facilitate reflection on these social norms and the adoption of new behaviours. Insensitive interventions cause parents and community members to become defensive, and resistant to change.

***Programmes must recognise the interests of multiple stakeholders in the decision making process.*** More often than not, girls are not involved in the decision for them to be married. Parents or male members of the community normally make the decision about when and to whom a girl gets married. Without working with them to change their perspectives, it will be impossible to end child marriage. Programmes should support parents and their daughters to communicate openly about their concerns. Girls must be empowered and equipped with skills, confidence and information to convince decision makers of the merits of education and comparative risks of child marriage.

***Engage with respected members of the community to facilitate behavioural change.*** Priests and other community leaders are important stakeholders as they have influence and command respect in communities. Working with respected leaders from other communities, in Ethiopia and globally, that have been involved in child marriage prevention programmes could also be successful. Families who have married their daughters later could be used as positive role models.

***Promote new norms that value girls' education and wellbeing.*** Programme messaging must create new aspirational social norms that benefit girls and child brides. To do this, stakeholders could sensitively share findings from this report. Examples include how girls who aren't forced into child marriages are more likely to make committed and respectful wives, or how educated girls have a wider range of options in life, and are more able to take care of their husbands and children. Providing incentives and support may encourage families to keep their daughters in school, for example paying school fees, and helping to pay for books and uniforms. This would require the identification of those in greatest need of financial or material support and assistance.

***Create networks and girls' clubs to improve the confidence and capacity of girls and child brides.*** Clubs and networks provide girls and child brides with a safe space where they can raise ideas and concerns, ending their isolation and building their confidence. Supporting each other and working together, networks of girls can raise their voices to influence key stakeholders, facilitate change and improve wellbeing and rights of all girls.

***Improve girls' access to information and services on family planning and sexual and reproductive health.*** Information should be distributed through clubs and networks, to both child brides and girls at risk of child marriage. Stakeholders should work with legislators, schools and health care workers to strengthen information and access to services targeting young people. Because of the benefits to girls' health and their access to opportunities, delaying first pregnancy should be a priority.

***Programmes should provide skills and livelihood opportunities for girls and child brides.*** This includes providing girls with business skill training and confidence building activities. Small loans would help individuals and groups kick-start their own businesses.

***Provide an enabling policy and legal environment that responds to the diverse needs of all girls.*** There is a need to create inclusive educational options for child brides, as at present the prevailing policy environment prevents married girls from accessing education. Laws on minimum age of marriage should be enforced at local levels.

# Annex – Sample Interview Questions

Below is a sample of the questions used in the PEER. The PRs covered each theme in turn, in the three interviews they carried out with child brides like themselves.

## Theme 1

1. How is life in your area?
2. Being a girl?
3. How is the situation of girls in your area?
4. What is expected from being a woman?
5. How do you see being a girl and poverty?
6. Girls and education?

## Theme 2

1. What do you think about marriage?
2. What do you say about child marriage?
3. How does child marriage occur/ happen?
4. What do you say about child marriage?
5. Who makes the ultimate decision on the marriage?
6. How is child marriage decided?
7. What is the average age that girls are married?
8. Why are girls married at such a young age?
9. Who do you think should be given to child marriage?
10. How is your relationship with your husband? And your in-laws?

## Theme 3

1. What kind of impact does child marriage have on your life?
2. What do you say about sexual intercourse?
3. How does pregnancy and childbirth look as a child? Or what is your opinion in the subject?
4. What are the positive impacts of being a child bride?
5. What is the effect of marriage in the social life of the child brides?
6. What is the impact of having children on the child brides?
7. Are there organizations in your community that provide support for the child brides?
8. What kind of support do the child brides need once they give birth?

# End Notes

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*Members of the child brides network in Lay Armachiho*



**PROFUTURES DEVELOPMENT  
INITIATIVE (PFDI)**  
~ ETHIOPIA ~

FORWARD is an African Diaspora women's campaign and support charity. As well as working with local partners in Africa, FORWARD works in the UK delivering training to professionals to raise awareness of FGM and working in schools to support girls at risk and affected by FGM. FORWARD works closely with communities and youth groups as well as advising other organisations and policy makers on the issues of FGM and Child Marriage. You can find out more about the work FORWARD does by visiting our website: [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)