Child Marriage in West Africa and Cameroon: A Desk Review

Plan WARO 2014

Final Draft

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30 October 2014
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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report of the desk review on child marriage in West Africa and Cameroon is the first step towards Plan West Africa Regional Office’s development of a sub-regional initiative on child marriage under the framework of the Global Girls Innovation Programme (GGIP). The desk review was conducted from June to October 2014 to meet three objectives:

i. Map existing research on child marriage in the four focal countries, plus Benin, Togo and Cameroon, to identify trends and patterns across a range of factors and key drivers for change at different levels of society;
ii. Map existing work within and outside Plan and document best practices and key actors involved with efforts to tackle child marriage;
iii. Formulate research questions to explore for Phase 2 and provide recommendations for the type of research needed.

Four francophone countries were selected as the focus for this review: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Mali. To investigate the causes and effects of child marriage and existing efforts to reduce the practice in the four focal countries and the region as a whole, the team conducted a broad literature review, key informant interviews with Plan staff and external experts, and an analysis of the latest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data. Each component has informed and is presented in this report.

Child, or early, marriage is defined as a formal or informal union, including legal, religious or customary marriage, of anyone under the age of 18. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) prohibits child marriage and betrothal and recommends a minimum age of marriage of 18 years for both girls and boys across Africa (Article XXI).

Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon. It affects girls in much greater numbers than boys (Plan International 2013) and is perpetuated by inequality and discrimination at all levels of society. The median age at first marriage for men aged 25-29 is over six years later than for women of the same age: in Burkina Faso it is 18 compared to 24 years; in Niger it is 16 compared to 23 years of age. An estimated six million girls married before 18 years of age live in West Africa (Walker 2013). The region contains countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world.

Key Findings

Overview

Child marriage rates and numbers have declined overall across the region in the last decade but the pace and direction of change has varied from country to country. In Burkina Faso, 31% adolescent girls aged 15-19 reported being currently married compared to 33% in Guinea, 43% in Mali and 61% in Niger.

Among those countries in which Plan works marital trends and patterns differ. Niger has the lowest median age at first marriage at 15.7 years, which has barely changed over the last decade. In Guinea however, change between survey rounds is relatively significant: declines
in the proportion of child marriages has positively affected the median age at first marriage, which has risen from 16.2 in 2005 to 17 in 2012.

**Figure 1: Marital status of adolescent females aged 15-19 by country**

However, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin show a negative trend towards *earlier* age at first marriage, despite having a low-moderate proportion of early marriages overall. The slight increase by 3% in the proportion of women married by age 15 in Burkina Faso between 2003 and 2010 may be a cause for concern.

The same features of a girl’s life can be both *cause and consequence* of marriage: early sexual debut may precipitate early marriage or be the result of marriage; economic hardship can propel a young girl’s wedding through the exchange of bride price or can delay marriage until the family can afford a wedding; poor access and quality of schooling can push girls to marry while premature drop-out is a consequence of marriage. Child marriage in West Africa and Cameroon is strongly associated with poverty, rurality, illiteracy, lack of education, and early sexual debut but the association of these factors to marriage is complex and varies by girl, community, country.

**Socio-demographic status**

In all four countries there is a higher prevalence and lower median age at first marriage in rural areas. The proportion of women aged 20-24 who married before the age of 18 is at least 20% higher (latest DHS data) in rural compared to urban areas. Among women aged 20-24 living in rural areas in Burkina Faso, 62% were married by age 18 compared to 27% urban women. In Guinea, 68% women aged 20-24 living in rural areas were married by age 18; in Mali the figure is 66%. In Niger the difference is even greater (85% rural women compared to 44% urban women married by age 18). In every country, the region around the capital city has the highest proportion of women aged 20-24 who remain unmarried (at least 30%). However, early marriage is a phenomenon of cities as well as the countryside.

Change seems to happen first and faster in urban areas – whether positive or negative change related to marriage. In Mali there are indications of a negative trend towards earlier age at first marriage in urban areas; in Niger by contrast, women’s median age at first marriage is increasing in both rural and urban areas, but increasing more dramatically in urban areas.
The intersections of religion and ethnicity indicate that religious affiliation per se is not solely driving child marriage across the region. In Burkina Faso in particular, the data suggests that ethnicity may have an effect on age at marriage independent of religion. Across the countries with data, the majority of Peul women aged 20-24, who tend mostly to be Muslim, marry before the age of 18 (75% in Burkina and 59% in Guinea).

**Gender inequality**

Inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender is a root cause of the perpetuation of child marriage. Across West Africa socialisation processes reinforce the low status of women and girls and enforce their private role as wives and mothers. Rites associated with puberty and the transition to adulthood, such as female genital cutting (FGC) and seclusion, are bound to unequal gender norms. FGC is common across West Africa. Gender violence and abuse in the home and at school are common: over half of all adolescent girls aged 15-19 in Guinea and Mali believe that wife beating is justified if a woman argues with her husband or goes out without telling him.

Girls’ physical and psychological integrity is at high risk in child marriage. The exchange of goods and/or money as part of a bride price is common to all focal countries as is polygamy, both of which operate to reinforce women’s exclusion and discrimination in marriage and the marital process. In Niger, over one third of women are currently in polygamous unions. In Guinea and Niger, migration trends associated with the economy have an impact on marriage trends, including the movement of men within and across countries and subsequently arranged marriages and movement of new brides across borders.

**Poverty**

The association of current wealth status on historic age at first marriage should be observed with caution because individual women’s wealth status now (their spousal family) may well be different from their wealth status at the time of their marriage (their natal family). At an aggregate level it seems that currently wealthier women are more likely to have married later than poorer women. However, the positive effect of wealth seems to make a significant difference to age at marriage only among the wealthiest families, not those at the lower quintiles. The differences are much slighter among the poorest wealth quintiles of women. In all four countries marriage among the wealthiest women is later by over a year on average compared to women in the next wealth quintile. In Mali and Niger the change in
proportions marrying before age 18 by wealth quintile are irregular. Child marriage is not eliminated by wealth: 38% of the wealthiest 20-24 year old women in Mali reported being married before the age of 18.

**Figure 3: Mean age at first marriage of all women (15-49) by highest wealth quintiles**

![Figure 3](image)

**Education**

Higher educational attainment is regularly correlated with later age at first marriage. In Guinea and Niger where child marriage rates are over 60%, less than a quarter of female youth are literate; in Cameroon female youth literacy is over 75% and child marriage rates are less than 40%. Across the latest DHS, in Burkina Faso 63% women with no education married before 18 compared to 42% of women with incomplete primary schooling; in Guinea 70% of women with no education married early compared to 55% of women with primary schooling; in Niger the comparison is 84% to 68%. In each case the difference between the proportion of women with no education married early compared to women with some primary schooling is at least 15%.

**Figure 4: Proportion women married by age 18 by educational attainment**

![Figure 4](image)

Nevertheless, the premise that girls should stay in school longer to delay early marriage too often ignores the increasing risk of exposure to violence, sex and early pregnancy that ensues from remaining in school after puberty, especially in the context of poor quality schooling. In Mali major barriers to retention and drivers of premature school drop-out among girls are late age at entry and the poor quality of the education system. For girls in
school prior to marriage, the initiation of the marital process is highly likely to negatively affect their attendance in school at upon formalisation to contribute to permanent drop-out. The holistic package of what girls learn in school (knowledge, attitudes and behaviours) is critical to the timing and risk of marriage and pregnancy.

Health

The majority of girls in West Africa have their first child within marriage (Walker, 2013) and the majority also experience sexual debut within marriage – this is the case in Guinea, Mali and Niger. Fear of pre-marital pregnancy is a commonly cited trigger for marriage. This fear tends to be associated with shame and dishonour more than with the risks to young girls’ health. In Niger there is very low prevalence of sex before marriage. However, in the three other countries sexual debut either already occurs on average slightly earlier than marriage (Guinea and Mali) and/or sexual debut is getting younger (Burkina Faso) especially among young urban girls. There is generally a close association in these four countries between marriage and sexual debut, but in some locations early/earlier sex is raising the risk of early and premarital pregnancy.

Childbirth is highly likely within two years of marriage in all four countries. This points to the fact that fear of social stigma associated with bearing a child outside wedlock is much stronger than the fear of negative health consequences of early pregnancy. An overall lack of contraceptive use exacerbates sexually transmitted infections and HIV transmission.

Existing programmes

Six broad and overlapping themes capture all existing interventions to specifically or inadvertently reduce or tackle child marriage in the focal countries. The six themes are:

i. Child rights and protection
ii. Girls’ education and empowerment
iii. Sexual and reproductive health
iv. Maternal and child health
v. Community awareness raising and mobilisation
vi. Economic livelihoods including skills training.

While there seems to be much emphasis on engaging girls and their families to delay child marriage, there is much less emphasis on engaging with potential grooms/husbands and their families. As a consequence there is an unexplained and potentially harmful imbalance of emphasis between ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ participants and factors.

In all four focal countries, Plan has very little experience of conducting or engaging on child marriage prevention, except through discrete research or activities captured under Child Protection programming. This is ad hoc, and there is very little documented learning to date. However, Plan’s PU locations, strengths in Child Centred Community Development (CCCD) and adolescent programming, and partnerships with Ministries and civil society position it well to develop an effective sub-regional child marriage programme.
Reseach needs and information gaps

Utilisation of a Sphere of Influence (Section 2.5) in which girls, the family, community, legislation, policies and systems, and socio-political ideology, all exert a pressure on child marriage usefully lays out a framework for phase 2 research. Under each sphere of influence, we recommend research themes and question areas for further development and tailoring to national contexts, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Research theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Characteristics of married girls &amp; girls ‘at risk’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency and aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge, behaviour and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Power, decision-making and marital process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth and employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Power and peer relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious practice &amp; family law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis &amp; instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation, policies and systems</td>
<td>Child &amp; social protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education &amp; Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-political ideology</td>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Societal norms, economy and religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media &amp; technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complementary to specific research themes and general methodological advice, we offer three overarching recommendations for design of Phase 2 research:

1. Focus on collecting high quality qualitative data;
2. Consider developing long-term formal partnership(s) with accredited university or academic institution(s);
3. Maximise the potential and complementarity of Phase 2 by full and timely engagement with other research ongoing in the region.

Recommendations

1. We strongly recommended that Plan pursue its efforts to understand the local meanings, practices and processes of child marriage, including through well-planned Phase 2 research, in order that its sub-regional programme fully reflects a strong and thoughtful information base;
2. We strongly recommend that Plan COs maximise data collection opportunities by systematically reviewing research plans with a view to inserting questions on child marriage and ensuring that this data is collected sensitively, analysed fully and utilised in future programming.
3. We recommend that Plan Country Offices, with support from the Regional Office, develop tailored Theory of Change documents to share understanding internally of how to achieve positive change for girls against child marriage.

4. We recommend that a sub-national programme addresses the rights of both unmarried ‘at risk’ girls and currently or formerly married adolescent girls. We also strongly recommend that Plan develops strategies to work with men and their families complementary to engagements with girls’ families to tackle both the supply and demand for child marriage.

5. We recommend that Plan’s prevention and response interventions in child marriage are multi-sectoral and address the risk levels of young girls holistically. We also recommend that Plan pursue its efforts regarding birth registrations and birth certificates to facilitate discussion on children’s rights and minimum age legislation.

6. We recommend that Plan clearly signposts each of its activities and/or its overall approach on an ‘early marriage intervention continuum’ and maximises opportunities to work with already married girls and women on each type of intervention.

7. We recommend that Plan develops a clear advocacy strategy for its work at national level and identify clearly its objectives in terms of national dialogue enablers, legislative frameworks, media strategy and partnership building. The strategy can be based on position papers child marriage developed alongside the Theory of Change.

8. We recommend that Plan WARO builds strategic alliances with key players in the field particularly: UNFPA, Unicef, Girls not Brides and the Population Council. We strongly recommend that Plan sets up a reference group for its forthcoming work on child marriage comprising Child Protection leads and regional staff experts on gender and children.

9. We recommend that Plan undertakes thorough baseline studies at the onset of the sub-regional initiative, part of which will include the development of comparable indicators for monitoring child marriage across countries. In addition to periodic progress evaluations, we also recommend that Plan develops robust documentation templates and tools in order to capture incremental learning on what interventions are working in what contexts and why, and on tipping points, or triggers, of positive change.

We strongly recommend that Plan facilitates the sharing of information across the four focal countries through a sub-regional network. The platform could be used for both Plan staff and national stakeholders to learn from each other, explore the replication of good practices and contribute to the development of capacities of those countries that are weaker.

10. We recommend that Plan monitors child marriage during emergencies and considers developing relevant, targeted action plans to tackle child marriage during sudden or ongoing crises. We also recommend that Plan learns and shares lessons about what work in crisis and post-crisis contexts.
1. Introduction

1.1 Research background and Objectives

In June 2014 Plan West Africa Regional Office (Plan WARO) commissioned Phase 1 of a two-phase research project to build evidence-based interventions to reduce child marriage in West Africa and Cameroon. This project is the first step towards Plan WARO’s development of a sub-regional initiative on child marriage under the framework of the Global Girls Innovation Programme. The sub-regional initiative intends to support policy and behavioural change to reduce child marriage and promote girls’ secondary education in four francophone countries: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger.

The Phase 1 desk review has three objectives:

iv. Map existing research on child marriage in the four focal countries, plus Benin, Togo and Cameroon, to identify trends and patterns across a range of factors and key drivers for change at different levels of society;

v. Map existing work within and outside Plan and document best practices and key actors involved with efforts to tackle child marriage;

vi. Formulate research questions to explore for Phase 2 and provide recommendations for the type of research needed.

Phase 2 will comprise field visits to each of the four focal countries to explore in-depth the research question areas emerging from this desk review, and further issues arising, in order to inform Plan’s sub-regional initiative on child marriage.

Plan West Africa region covers twelve countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Three of the four principal countries investigated in this report are in the Sahel belt; while Guinea and the three secondary countries (Benin, Togo and Cameroon) are coastal, situated across West (and Central) Africa. All seven countries have high levels of poverty and inequality.

In West Africa, as globally, Plan’s approach to development is espoused by a Child-Centred Community Development (CCCD) strategy. CCCD aims to facilitate the realisation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Key elements of CCCD include participation, child-centred programming, supporting groups and organisations, and partnership, networking and relationship building. Additionally relevant to the sub-regional initiative on child marriage is Plan International’s Because I Am A Girl (BIAAG) initiative. BIAAG is a five-year campaign to increase the proportion of girls who complete nine years of education and receive a quality learning experience in the world’s poorest countries.
1.2 Methods

This review has four components:

i. Literature review
ii. Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey data
iii. Key Informant Interviews
iv. Report writing

The literature review compiled and critically assessed 80 academic and grey documents on the basis of five inclusion criteria:

i. Produced since 2000;
ii. Published in English and/or French;
iii. Currently in the public domain;
iv. Primary topic is early/child marriage;
v. Geographic coverage includes the West Africa region or Cameroon and/or at least one country in West Africa.

An annotated bibliography was developed to provide a summary description, assessment and index of documents included in the review. Grey literature includes Plan International publications as well as documents by UNFPA, Unicef, the Population Council and ICRW. In the academic sphere many high quality peer-reviewed papers are clustered in a few journals including the African Journal of Reproductive Health and Studies in Family Planning. Note that several of these journals approach early marriage as a risk factor for poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Other journals have contributed through a single issue publication dedicated to early marriage (e.g. Gender & Development, 11: 2, 2003). The review was not systematic but intended to provide broad coverage of the critical peer-reviewed and background literature on child marriage in the region (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of literature reviewed by type and geographic focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic focus</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Grey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global / Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scope
This review concentrated on the matter of early/child marriage within four francophone countries and their populations in West Africa, pointing out some critical transborder issues within the region. While there is an increasing focus in some European countries on immigrant girls being married back into their country of origin, this aspect is not part of the present research. The potential positive role of diaspora groups in raising awareness about child marriage would be an interesting topic to explore but is not part of this review.

Analysis of DHS data
Except where otherwise stated, data presented is from the most recent DHS survey for each country. Graphical presentations of marriage trends and factors is Section 3 is for women aged 20-24 unless otherwise stated. These women are the closest age group to our target, the majority of whom will have gone through critical transitions of first marriage and sexual debut in our focal countries. Some analysis for larger age groups of women are also given. The denominator is specified in each analysis. Where the median age at time of event is over 20, this is stated, as for example the median age of first birth among Nigerien women with secondary or higher education (see Section 3.4.e).

Key Informant Interviews
Interviews were requested with representatives of each of the four Plan focal countries, three regional Plan representatives and eight external organisations. The response rate was very good. A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted in August 2014 to inform this review, of which 6 were with Plan staff and 6 with representatives of other organisations working on child marriage in the region (see Annex B).

An interview guide was designed and tailored to each interviewee to provide a semi-structured framework for questioning. Key themes included: identification of key drivers of early marriage; existing good practices in research or programming; projections and hopes for the future including resource provision, programming, research and advocacy.

Report writing
The report was compiled iteratively with reflections from both authors feeding in at various moments of the review to each section. The draft report was submitted on 17 September, to which Plan provided feedback. It was finalised and submitted on 31 October 2014.

1.3 Limitations

The desk-based nature of the review has limited opportunities to explore a diversity of views on child marriage, particularly from local NGOs, communities with the highest prevalence rates and from girls and women, boys and men concerned. The timing of the review (August) constrained the availability of some key informants with whom we hoped to speak – including in particular UNFPA regional experts. Phase 2 will be critical in the development of a more localised and nuanced description and analysis of the issue.

Plan and many other NGOs and agencies’ efforts to learn about and address child marriage in the region is at its infancy. Consequently, there is very little documentation of existing or evaluated best practices from which Plan could learn lessons and capitalise knowledge to inform future programming. Within Plan, this lack of best practice examples seems to be associated with a piecemeal approach to child marriage with discrete projects under child protection, education and health programmes.
Among the four focal countries, the date of the last DHS ranges by four years. This provides a good basis for cross-country comparison. Cameroon and Benin conducted surveys in the last three years. A survey was conducted in Togo in 2013 but datasets and reports were not available at the time of writing and the previous survey was conducted in 1998. For each country, Table 2 shows the year of the last survey, number of women aged 15-49 years sampled (total population, female 15-49, survey year) and critical design issues. For all countries the women sample is around 1% or less of the total sample population.

Table 2: DHS Survey features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. women sample (total pop, millions)</th>
<th>Critical issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>17,087 (3.8)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9,142 (2.7)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>10,424 (3.2)</td>
<td>Excludes the North; cannot compare national data with earlier rounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11,160 (3.6)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>15,426 (4.2)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>16,599 (2.3)</td>
<td>No HIV testing module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>1998-2013</td>
<td>8,569-9,480 (1.7)</td>
<td>No HIV testing; no FGC module (2013 ongoing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While DHS data provides indications of trends and associations of child marriage and other socio-demographic characteristics, they become quickly out-dated. Drawing on DHS data to plan NGO programmes must be done cautiously and, where possible, with additional complementary data and contextual understanding. DHS statistics alone give only a partial picture of the marital conditions of girls and young women today. Critical issues that require acknowledging include:

- Definitions of marital unions may vary between survey rounds within the same country and across surveys in different countries;
- Comparisons of historic marriage data with present socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. wealth, media exposure) can only very loosely indicate associations, especially for older women;
- Biases may affect sensitive data, including marital information, including recall bias (misremembering/inaccurate reporting of age at events) and social desirability bias (answering favourably). Both can deliver over or under-estimates of dates and data.
- Collecting sensitive information from adolescents (15-19 year olds) and on adolescence is also prone to validity concerns.
2. Child Marriage in West Africa and Cameroon

2.1 Definition and scope

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) prohibits child marriage and betrothal and recommends a minimum age of marriage of 18 years for both girls and boys across Africa (Article XXI). This Charter conveys the principles of earlier international conventions, critically CEDAW Article 16 and the CRC, whose provisions lay down the definition of a child (a person under 18 years) and that child marriage or marriage without the free and full consent of both spouses is a violation of human rights.

Child, or early, marriage is defined as a formal or informal union, including legal, religious or customary marriage, of anyone under the age of 18. All DHS reviewed define marriage thus and include informal consensual partnerships (“living together”).¹ Child marriage creates multiple rights violations including the right to personal integrity, education, health, freedom from violence and discrimination, and sexual and reproductive health rights.

Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon. It affects girls in greater numbers than boys (Plan International 2013). The median age at first marriage for men (aged 25-54) is over 20 in all seven countries reviewed. Among men aged 25-29, 17% were married at age 20 in Niger and 13% in Cameroon; at age 25, 65% and 40% were married respectively. By contrast, half (49%) of girls under the age of 19 are married across the region (Walker 2013). An estimated six million child brides live in West Africa. Child marriage is perpetuated by gender inequality and discrimination at all levels of society. Upon marriage girls lose their childhood even while they are psychosocially and physically underdeveloped. Regardless of her age, the married girl legally reaches majority, becomes an adult woman and loses her protective rights as a child. The CRC’s caveat to its definition of a child – ‘unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’ - is thus reproduced across national laws, policies and practices with severe negative consequences.

The Right to Education report (Melchiorre & Atkins 2011) highlights inconsistencies across four minimum age legislations: years of schooling; age of marriage; age of employment and age of criminal responsibility. Their results show ‘incoherence in domestic legislation governing the actions of children’ with many countries failing to protect and promote children’s fundamental rights. In Cameroon the minimum age of marriage with parental consent is 15 for girls while admission to employment is legal at 14 and the minimum age for criminal responsibility is 10; in Niger compulsory education ends at 16 while girls can marry at 15 (ibid.,). These highly variable periodic markers of ‘transitions to adulthood’ (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2005) defy international agreements on the definition of a child given in the CRC, which has been ratified by all West African countries.

Critical phases within childhood contribute to the process of a girl’s transition to womanhood. UNFPA offers two sub-groups of early adolescence (10-14 years) and late adolescence (15-19 years) with youth (15-24 years) as an overlapping category across the transition to adulthood. These concepts are not universally agreed; indeed at local levels markers of girls’ transition to womanhood tend to be much more marked on and by the body, with bodily development justifying changes to social positions.

¹ The latest DHS in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger include “consensual unions” with “de facto unions” to define marriage.
2.2 Trends and patterns

The West Africa region has the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa and includes countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world. This section describes the key trends and patterns in child marriage in West Africa in general with a focus on four countries: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Mali.

The region is comprised of landlocked and coastal francophone, anglophone and lusophone countries with diverse large and minority ethnic groups. The 17 states comprise membership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Large parts of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are in the Sahel, a semi-arid transition zone to the Sahara. Islam is the predominant religion of countries to the interior, including Mali, Niger and Guinea and the northern areas of Benin, Togo and Burkina Faso. Democratic transitions across many countries have been marred in more recent years by challenges including political instability and conflict, youth unemployment, continuing endemic poverty, and the negative effects of climate change. Ethno-religious instability and security concerns have affected Mali and Niger in the last five years; more recently the Ebola virus outbreak has highlighted weak institutions and inadequate healthcare, education and other public services in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Plan WARO currently operates in 12 of these states and is planning future operations in one additional country, Nigeria.

West Africa has a young population: over 50% of the focal countries’ populations are under 18 years of age. Table 3 indicates the context in which young people, particularly young women and girls, live in seven countries in which Plan works. All have a low human development ranking, relatively high population growth rates and very low levels of female youth literacy. Mali and Togo have particularly high levels of youth unemployment. Niger has the lowest human development and gender inequality ranking in the world; less than a quarter of young women are literate.

Table 3: Socioeconomic data - seven Plan countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>HDI index (rank/187)</th>
<th>GII index (rank/149)</th>
<th>Population growth rate %</th>
<th>Youth unemployment %</th>
<th>Youth literacy female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>0.388 (181)</td>
<td>0.607 (133)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>0.392 (179)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>0.407 (176)</td>
<td>0.673 (148)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>0.337 (187)</td>
<td>0.674 (149)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>0.476 (165)</td>
<td>0.614 (134)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>0.473 (166)</td>
<td>0.579 (129)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>0.504 (152)</td>
<td>0.622 (138)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from: UNDP Human Development Reports 2014; World Bank; UNESCO EFA GMR 2013/4

It is in this context that some of the highest child marriage prevalence rates persist. Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world: 75% of Nigerien girls marry before the age of 18. Over half of all girls in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso will marry before the age of 18. Their prevalence rates of 63%, 55% and 52% respectively are in the top ten countries globally. If present trends continue, over 2.8 million girls born between 2005 and 2010 in these four countries will marry before the age of 18 by 2030 (Loaiza & Wong 2012).

Graph 1 shows that in Burkina Faso, 31% girls report being currently married; that proportion is 33% in Guinea, 43% in Mali and 61% in Niger.
While Niger, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso all have high prevalence rates, countries in the region with lower prevalence, such as Nigeria, contribute enormously to absolute numbers of child marriages. Nigeria’s child marriage prevalence is 39% but this represents the same total number of women aged 20-24 - 2.8 million - married by age 18 in 2010 as the projections for all four countries combined by 2030. The vast majority of these Nigerian child brides live in Northern states bordering Niger.

Child marriage rates and numbers have declined overall across the region in the last decade but the pace and direction of change has varied from country to country. In assessing change, it is important to note national and sub-national population characteristics that contextualise child marriage. The young age structures of all four focal countries combined with high fertility rates and significant levels of un/under-employment has a significant bearing on child marriage.

ICRW’s literature review for Unicef (2014b) examines the drivers of positive change associated with the trend of delayed marriage and first birth in the region. ICRW stress the intersection and concurrent operation of economic and cultural factors in the increasing average age of marriage and first birth in West and Central Africa. Their focus on where, how and why positive change is happening, and planned empirical research in Senegal to locate and explore this rising age trend, will provide a useful complement to literature reviews and studies that explore the drivers of the perpetuation of child marriage.

Among those countries in which Plan works trends in marriage differ. Niger has the lowest median age at first marriage at 15.7 years and this has barely changed in the last decade (Table 4). Ghana and Senegal have high median ages at first marriage at 19.8 and 19.6 years. In three out of four focal countries a quarter or more women were married by age 15, with very little change between the two latest DHS rounds. In all four countries over half of women married by 18. In Guinea, the change between survey rounds has been relatively significant: declines in the proportion of women marrying as children has positively affected the median age at first marriage, increasing from 16.2 in 2005 to 17 in 2012.

However, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin show a negative trend towards earlier age at first marriage, despite having a low-moderate proportion of early marriages overall. The slight increase by 3% in the proportion of women married by age 15 in Burkina Faso between 2003 and 2010 may be a cause for concern (Table 4).
Table 4: Child marriage in two DHS rounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>DHS year</th>
<th>% married by 15 (variance)*</th>
<th>% married by 18 (variance)*</th>
<th>Median age at first marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>(2003 / 2010)</td>
<td>7 / 10 (+3)</td>
<td>59 / 53 (-6)</td>
<td>17.7 / 17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>(2005 / 2012)</td>
<td>24 / 27 (-3)</td>
<td>73 / 60 (-13)</td>
<td>16.2 / 17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>(2001 / 2006)</td>
<td>25 / 23 (-2)</td>
<td>67 / 67 (0)</td>
<td>16.5 / 16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>(2006 / 2012)</td>
<td>38 / 30 (-8)</td>
<td>80 / 77 (-3)</td>
<td>15.5 / 15.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Rates of marriage under age 15 and under age 18 vary across countries. In Niger around one third of girls marry before age 15 while in Burkina Faso few girls marry before 15 but over half marry by 18. This highlights the importance of identifying national ‘tipping points’ for marriage and related events including sexual debut, first birth and school drop-out. These tipping points represent the age at which event prevalence increases significantly and often cluster in the few years around menarche.

There is strong and widely reported evidence to indicate that countries with the highest prevalence rates for early age at marriage tend also to have the highest total fertility rates. In Guinea, Mali & Niger over 40% women aged 20-24 reported a birth before age 18 and 1 in 10 had a birth before age 15 (Williamson 2013). Niger has the highest rate of early marriage in the world and the highest total fertility rate at an estimated 7.6 children per woman. Mali and Burkina Faso are both in the top ten countries with the highest fertility rates in the world, with Guinea in the top 20.

While trends at the regional and national levels are striking, national figures hide sub-national and trans-national nuances and patterns that are critical to understanding girls’ lived experiences of marriage. A Plan video (2014) highlights the transnational features of child marriage in the context of political instability, showing the pressures on adolescent Malian girls’ in refugee camps in Niger to marry early, a pressure worsened by conflict, displacement and economic hardship. The prevalence and characteristics of child marriage also cross national borders through homogeneous ethnicities, religious and residence characteristics. The large Fulani, Mossi and Mandika communities straddle countries dispersing traditional practices and beliefs across state boundaries. The migration of child brides within ethnic groups but between national borders, for example, Niger and Nigeria or Guinea and Senegal, is under-researched but often reported (IRIN 2009; ACP 2012).

This review is therefore keen to understand what it means to be a girl in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Niger and what it means to be a poor, rural girl, a girl from a particular ethnic group or specific religion, in order to identify girls most at risk of early marriage, and those in marriage most in need of support, for the development of sensitive, appropriate child marriage prevention and response strategies.
2.3 Drivers of Child Marriage

What are the drivers of decisions to marry girls early in the region? Why is early marriage perpetuated and by whom? This section provides an overview of critical drivers common across the region while Section 3 details further the national and sub-national causes for the perpetuation of child marriage in four focal countries.

Drivers of child marriage exist at multiple levels of society from national law, policy and political will; to regional governance; to community attitudes and the status of women and girls in the household. Many researchers and programmers draw on the social-ecological framework to conceptualise the multiple locations of drivers of child marriage and show how, at each level, negative conditions trickle down to affect the life of the child bride (ICRW, 2014a). Framing child marriage as a form of gender violence that violates girls’ rights requires us to put girls’ at the centre of a conceptual framework on child marriage. It then enables a consideration of girls’ agency and aspirations in the context of critical influencers and pressures bearing down on her life story (Section 2.5).

The same features of a girl’s life can be both cause and consequence of marriage: early sexual debut may precipitate early marriage or be the result of marriage; economic hardship can propel a young girl’s wedding through the exchange of bride price or can delay marriage until the family can afford a wedding; poor access and quality of schooling can push girls to marry while premature drop-out is a consequence of marriage. The association of these factors to marriage is complex and varies by girl, community, country.

Marriage is not a monolith; it is a process, a series of occasions over a period of time that culminates in a legally or informally binding union. The marital process varies between families and across communities (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine 2005). Girls experiences on the pathway to, and within, marriage are determined by age, gender, poverty, traditional practices, girls’ agency, identity and relationships (Arnot et al. 2012). Married girls inhabit diverse types of union with diverse day-to-day living arrangements, aspirations and expectations.

Despite the diversity of pathways and experiences of child marriage, in West Africa and Cameroon it is strongly associated with poverty, rurality, illiteracy, lack of education, and early sexual debut. However, key factors at national level are not necessarily the same as those at community or household level. While girls living in rural areas are among those most at risk of child marriage, this is not to say that girls in urban areas are not at risk. Regional differences may also be more or less significant to rates of child marriage: in Mali and Burkina Faso, for example, regional differences seem to be significant while in Niger and Guinea they are less so (Jain & Kurz 2007). The tables provided in this section suggest possible associations, not cause and effect.

Indeed several socio-economic status associations with child marriage function in multiple directions. Research emphasises that girls with secondary or higher education marry later. It recommends expanding access to education to delay child marriage and to reduce its negative consequences (Section 2.3.4). However, while girls who never attend school tend to marry earlier than girls who have attended school, among those who do attend, the risk of marriage varies by other factors including the quality of schooling and school environment. No education is a risk factor for child marriage but being in school can increase girls’ risk of marriage through real and perceived exposure to violence, sex and early pregnancy. School attendance can therefore precipitate as well as protect schoolgirls from early marriage.
The implication is that research needs to be specific, rigorous and context-sensitive with interventions tailored to findings that assess the relative significance and direction of different risk factors within a certain community or locality. Five critical ‘risk themes’, all of which are referenced in Plan WARO’s Thematic Framework for Child Protection (Plan WARO, 2013), should be considered.

2.3.1 Gender inequality and discrimination

Inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender is a root cause of the perpetuation of child marriage. Across West Africa socialisation processes reinforce the low status of women and girls, enforce their private role as wives and mothers and discourage participation in public life, belittle their confidence and smother their potential (World Vision 2008).

Rites associated with puberty and the transition to adulthood, such as female genital cutting (FGC) and seclusion, are bound to unequal gender norms. FGC is common across West Africa. Gender violence and abuse in the home and at school are common: according to the latest DHS surveys over half of all adolescent women aged 15-19 surveyed in Guinea and Mali believe that wife beating is justified if a woman argues with her husband or goes out without telling him. In Mali and Niger over half agree with at least one justification for wife beating and in Guinea the proportion is 89%.

Intense fear and stigmatisation of premarital pregnancy and the shame this incurs on families propel many girls into early marriages often with much older men. Once married, girls are more likely than their same-age counterparts to be sexually active and have unprotected sex. Polygamy is high and girls in polygamous unions in Guinea, Mali and Niger are likely to be married to men significantly older (at least five years older) than them. Polygamy reflects structural inequality as it is only men who can legitimately have plural marriages. Total fertility rates in the region are highest in countries in which child marriage rates are also the highest (Walker 2013).

Escaping from an early marriage usually means stigma and social exclusion for girls (Ouagraogo Ouattara et al. n.d; Ouassa n.d). Once in marriage, unequal divorce rights and societal attitudes make it very difficult and shameful for a woman to leave her husband. Escaping the marriage might mean reimbursing the bride price, a significant negative incentive (Sauvain-Dugerdel & Thiriat 2009). Further, the bride price exchange – goods or money negotiated and passed from the groom or groom’s family to the bride’s family - reinforces the notion of union as an economic transaction with the woman as capital (Nour 2009; Mbaye & Wagner 2013 in ICRW 2014b) rather than one based on full and free consent.

The perpetuation of child marriage highlights endemic unequal gender relations in societies. Among the twenty countries worldwide with the highest national prevalence rates of child marriage, all except Bangladesh (and Guinea and South Sudan with insufficient data) are among the countries with the highest Gender Inequality Ranking in 2013 (Table 2). Yet we know very little about men’s perceptions and experiences of child marriage – as husbands or, infrequently, as young grooms. There is a significant knowledge gap on men’s attitudes and experiences of marital processes associated with child marriage including bride price. The attitudes and experiences of fathers and extended male relatives is also rarely recounted in any depth.
2.3.2 Sociocultural traditions

The vast majority of men and women in the region are married by the age of 30. Marriage is a social norm and a goal for the families of adolescent girls. Marriage confers symbolic and actual gain; it tends to increase girl’s and her family’s status in the community. Virginity at marriage is highly regarded, influencing perceptions that girls must marry early. These traditional perceptions and practices are strongly rooted in gendered norms.

Maintaining or strengthening family or kinship ties is an important part of marriage in many places and offering a girl as a bride is a not uncommon way to settle debts or services (Population Council 2009). At the family level, the notion of intergenerational legacy exists in some communities including in Togo whereby a family who received a young bride ‘owes’ a young bride in return to the same family or their descendants. Bride kidnapping and sororate marriage\(^2\) may also contribute to the perpetuation of child marriage (Section 3).

Islamic countries and communities with majority Muslim populations tend to have higher rates of child marriage. However, child marriage is also a phenomenon in Christian, Hindu and secular countries. Clearly, one religion is not linked to child marriage globally (ICRW 2014b). Plan’s focal countries are majority Muslim but have varied sub-national rates of child marriage and median ages, including incidence and low median ages in non-Muslim communities. Other factors combine with religious affiliation to raise the risk of early marriage. Traditional attitudes in combination with strongly held religious beliefs, of any faith, may be more of a driver than religious status per se. This merits investigation at national level (Section 3) and during further research (Section 5).

The endurance of child marriage practices in history and tradition can result in it becoming ‘hidden’ when legislative change increases the minimum age of marriage. Elder males in powerful positions, including religious leaders and traditional chiefs, are likely to retain their authority to celebrate marriage under customary law. There is some evidence of chiefs using their position to ‘marry’ very young girls in secrecy (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2013). These are informal and non-legal ‘marriages’.

2.3.3 Poverty and economic shocks

Poverty affects child marriage both as a cumulative condition and a ‘shock’ or sudden economic hardship. Across the region, the poorest women tend to be the youngest to marry (Jain & Kurz 2007; Okonofua 2013; Walker 2013). The aggregate effect of poverty and sudden economic hardship can compel families to marry daughters early: the marriage provides the natal family with an injection of resources (money or goods) that they may be able to determine and the marriage relieves the family of the economic burden of a child. In some communities, married girls may be expected to provide resources back to her natal family, providing reciprocal assistance. A Plan Mali video (2014) emphasises this point in presenting a father whose wife had died. Contemplating marrying off his 12-year old daughter, he says: “The father can give away the girl, take the money, and satisfy the needs of his family.”

Marriage is also perceived as a route for the girl out of poverty. This has been stressed with regard to transnational early marriages (ACP 2012). A UNICEF study has indicated a

\(^2\) A husband forms a union or sexual relations with a sister of his wife, usually after the death of his wife or if his wife is infertile. Evidence is anecdotal but reported in parts of Guinea.
correlation between economic crisis and increases in child marriage rates, including by groups who do not usually practice child marriage (Assani 2000 in UNICEF 2001). On the other hand, lack of financial security, associated with unemployment or socio-political instability, can also be a reason for men or families to delay marriage until they have the financial social stability to afford a bride price and take care of a wife and family.

Table 5 indicates a broad correlation between national GDP per capita and the prevalence of child marriage, with Niger and Guinea having the lowest GDP and highest rates of child marriage, with Ghana, by contrast, with the highest GDP of this group and the lowest prevalence of child marriage. However, this association is inconsistent and not statistically verified. Togo, for example has a low GDP per capita and a low prevalence of child marriage.

### Table 5: GDP and Child Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP per capita</th>
<th>Married by 18 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: World Bank; Unicef State of World’s Children 2013

At an aggregate level, girls from wealthier families tend to marry later (World Bank 2012 cited in ICRW 2014b). However, the positive effect of wealth only seems to make a significant difference to age at marriage among families in the highest wealth quintile and not for those at, or transitioning between, the lower quintiles (Section 3). The high level of economic capital required to effect positive change is significant and less well documented.

Factors associated with and in combination with poverty affect the risk of child marriage. The contemporary context of increased cost of living combined with high unemployment, illiteracy and poor education systems limit girls’, parents’, and potential men’s opportunities for choice and free consent in union formation. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas where traditional attitudes and behaviours also tend to remain for longer – combined, then, these three features characterise many married girls’ lives and are mutually reinforcing as critical dimensions of child marriage.

### 2.3.4 Weak institutions and services

a) Legislation and policy

Many research studies and reports emphasise problems caused by two connected legislative issues: (i) different concurrent legal frameworks for marriage; (ii) lack of knowledge of existing legislation. These problems do not necessarily drive child marriage but do contribute to its perpetuation.

Constitutional guarantees for equal rights and protection, often written in as a result of ratifications to international conventions, are undermined by allowances for girls’ marriage under the age of 18. This creates a common inconsistency between conventions signed and national laws in place. Different minimum age of marriage for girls and boys in many
countries including Burkina Faso Niger and Mali is a manifestation of institutional discrimination against women. Concurrent legal frameworks – civil, customary and religious law existing side by side – may facilitate informal and underage unions by their complexity and tacitly different standards often on the grounds of religion. Where family law regulates marriage and is in the hands of Islamic courts minimum age laws may be overlooked or redefined. Community and religious leaders, without whom custom weddings cannot be celebrated, may overlook violations of the minimum age (Boureima 2013). There is disconnect between policy and practice perpetuated at all levels, reinforced by a common gap in addressing adolescent rights in policy.

Surveys suggest that many parents are simply not aware of existing marriage legislation (Kabore & Yaro 2008; Population Council 2004). This is partially linked to weak information dissemination mechanisms from institutional and non-governmental partners and lack of knowledge of officials themselves (Boureima 2013). Law enforcement is limited in countries where the legislation is not known by both adolescents and their families. When adolescent girls are more aware of the legislation than older members of their community, they might feel that reporting their case will only make things worse. The stigma associated with escaping a marriage at a young age is a high social cost to pay for adolescent girls. Overall lack of trust in public authorities, particularly the police and justice system, constrains accountability mechanisms. Justice procedures are costly and corruption may play out to the detriment of the girl.

The paucity of birth registrations also acts as a significant hindrance to the implementation of national legislation, simply because this makes it difficult to determine a girl’s age. In Niger, for example, the Constitution states that full consent of spouses is required for a marriage and provides for penalties in case of non-accordance, but the application is challenging in a context in which only 32% births are registered (UNICEF 2013). Child protection mechanisms tend to be enormously constrained by weak intersectoral communication and coordination. Child marriage prevention is not an exception.

b) Education

Higher educational attainment is consistently connected in the literature with later age at first marriage: girls with no schooling marry earlier than girls with secondary or higher education (Loaiza & Wong 2012). In Guinea and Niger where child marriage rates are over 60%, less than a quarter of female youth are literate; in Cameroon female youth literacy is over 75% and child marriage rates are less than 40% (Table 2).

However, the direction of the association for girls who have ever attended school is inconstant: early marriage may directly cause school drop out or drop out for other reasons may, in time, lead to marriage. A study of five francophone West African countries including Burkina Faso and Guinea (Lloyd & Mensch 2008) found that other reasons for drop out, associated with the school and family context, trumped marriage.

The confounding effect of educational access and quality is critical in assessing the contribution of schooling to child marriage. Despite education being free of charge by law in all seven countries, the hidden costs of schooling prohibit many girls from enrolling and attending regularly. Evidence across Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that girls who want to attend school but whose families cannot afford the costs may engage in transactional sex, for example with so-called ‘sugar-daddies’ (Unicef 2012a). In Ghana this phenomenon presents the risk of early pregnancy and early marriage as a consequence, jeopardising the education that girls’ strove to continue.
A good quality education system requires attention to the learning environment (sanitation, security, gender sensitivity), the content of education (curriculum, materials), teaching and learning processes (teaching methods, support structures) and learning outcomes (exams, skills and empowerment). Many countries in the region are, instead, characterised by poor quality education systems and schools that fail to impart basic skills and knowledge to girls and boys. The holistic package of what girls learn in school (knowledge, attitudes and behaviours) is critical to the timing and risk of marriage and pregnancy.

The premise that girls should stay in school longer to delay early marriage thus too often ignores the increasing risk of exposure to violence, sex and early pregnancy that ensues from remaining in school after puberty, especially in the context of poor quality schooling.

c) Health

The majority of girls in West Africa have their first child within marriage (Walker, 2013) and a significant proportion also experience sexual debut within marriage – this is the case in Guinea, Mali and Niger. In Niger only 3% and in Mali 13% of unmarried adolescents have had sex. Many report their age at sexual debut and first union as the same. However, the timing of sexual debut and marriage varies considerably across countries in the region and within countries: in Ghana, for example, sex before marriage is more common.

An individual girl’s age at first menstruation is likely to have a significant bearing on the timing of subsequent sexual and reproductive health events and marriage, particularly combined with other high risk factors. However, there is relatively little data on age at menarche – it is not, for example, systematically gathered in DHS. The declining age of menarche worldwide, as population health generally improves, increases the risk of earlier marriage and childbearing, as families and a potential husband perceive menstruation as readiness for marriage and motherhood (Williamson 2013).

Fear of pre-marital pregnancy is a commonly cited trigger for marriage. This fear tends to be associated with shame and dishonour more than with the risks to young girls’ health. Childbirth is highly likely within two years of marriage so that early marriage precipitates early pregnancy and motherhood in childhood (Williamson 2013). This points to the fact that fear of social stigma associated with bearing a child outside wedlock is much stronger than the fear of negative health consequences of early pregnancy. These attitudes require in-depth localised investigation, to which Plan’s 2014 review of adolescent sexual and reproductive health in West Africa is likely to provide a useful assessment.

2.3.5 Fragility and emergencies

Fragility, conflict, climate change and disasters put pressure on families’ livelihoods and increases vulnerability. Nine of the ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world appear on the 2013 OECD list of fragile states.

Fragility and emergencies weaken government institutions and services and limit economic opportunities. Conflict, in particular, is linked with increased risk of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence against women. In such circumstances, early marriage becomes a more palatable option for parents and families looking to protect their girls. Conflict may make journeys to school more dangerous so that parents keep girls at home. Indeed ‘existing data and an abundance of qualitative evidence point to intensified risks of child
marriage in fragile states affected by natural disaster, conflict, and other causes of social instability’ (Lemmon 2014).

In such contexts, child marriage may be perceived as a protective mechanism from real or perceived threats of violence, drought, uncertain futures (Myers 2013). There is a transnational component to child marriage in fragility and emergencies as children and families cross borders into refugee camps, where their uncertain futures persist. Recent accounts of Syrian child brides in Jordan and Malian girls married very young in Niger exemplify this heightened challenge.

While insecurity perpetuates and even exacerbates child marriage, child marriage during periods of relative stability can also reinforce instability through its denial of education, stymied economies and perpetuation of female poverty. This two-way association is rarely discussed and highlights remaining gaps in knowledge and understanding of the associations between different forms of instability and child marriage.

2.4 Consequences of Child Marriage

The effects of child marriage not only have serious and lifelong negative consequences on girls but also on their children, their families, communities and country. This section summarises the evidence of the effects of child marriage and how the practice violates a wide range of children’s rights.

2.4.1 Girls’ dignity and integrity

Child marriage violates a range of child rights and influence their agency, integrity and dignity. It denies childhood. Child marriage infringes children’s rights to participate in decisions that affect them as marriages are often forced upon them. Young teenagers moving to their step families will become isolated from their support networks, typically their family, school and peer networks in the community. In many cases their mobility will be restricted (Population Council 2007). In the worse cases brides follow their husband to a neighbouring country and are deprived of any support network (Boureima 2013). The ability to cope on their own and to develop survival strategies in their new environment, particularly with regard to gaining some autonomy will vary from girls to girls depending on their level of agency and experience of their early marriage (Sauvain-Dugerdil & Thiriat 2009)

Girls’ physical integrity is at high risk in child marriage: violence and forced/unwanted sexual intercourse are possible consequences. Girls’ ability to negotiate safe sex practices with their partners is often limited, especially in a context where many girls are involved in relationships with much older men and having multiple wives is widespread. Girls’ low level of education and exposure to sex and reproductive health education will also constrain their ability to negotiate safe sex practices. Several papers also identify girls’ vulnerability to domestic violence as a direct consequence of child marriage (Population Council 2009), which is also a health issue.

Defence mechanisms that include active or passive resistance to their new husband and family can lead to domestic crisis, separation and divorce, all having a long lasting effect on adolescent girls and young adults not least due to the associated verbal, psychological and possibly physical violence (Population Council 2009).
2.4.2 Education

Child marriage often violates children’s right to education. For girls in school before marriage, early marriage is highly likely to contribute to premature and permanent school drop-out. Research conducted in Guinea Bissau and Nigeria, for example, all highlight that the denial of education is a consequence of early marriage (CERFODES 2012; ActionAid 2012). Similar findings arose from research on out-of-school children in Liberia with 39.9% of households with at least one child out of school stating that school drop out was due to early marriage (UNICEF 2012b).

Child marriage often affects girls’ regular attendance even before they officially enter their marital union due to the necessity to prepare their trousseau. In poor families in particular girls may repeatedly miss school to engage in income generating activities to finance their trousseau (Ministère de l’Action Sociale et de la Solidarité Nationale du Togo 2012).

Lloyd & Mensch (2008) ascertained that early marriage is more likely to limit girls’ educational horizons than early childbirth in five countries researched in West Africa including Burkina Faso and Guinea. Despite lack of research on the relative effects of childbirth and marriage on schooling, this would suggest that girls giving birth outside of wedlock could more easily pursue their studies with a good support network than married girls who have a different social status. While neither status is conducive to achieving a child’s full potential, this finding suggests the highly restricted mobility and options available to married women, even compared to unmarried mothers which merits further research.

2.4.3 Health

The adverse sexual and reproductive health consequences for girls married as children is a major driver of research and cause for concern about child marriage. The majority of West Africans surveyed in different contexts cite health consequences of child marriage, especially complications during childbirth, over any other type of effect (Boureima 2013; Kante 2009; Tebeu et al 2012). Marriage is a principal risk factor for pregnancy; in West Africa most women become pregnant and bear their first child within marriage. In Burkina Faso, for example, half of girls who marry before 18 get pregnant within the first year (Walker 2013).

Married adolescent girls tend to make limited use of family planning due to social expectations of swift pregnancy after marriage and limited education curtailing knowledge about access to, and use of, contraception. In addition to early pregnancies, the lack of contraceptive take-up may also exacerbate sexually transmitted infections and HIV transmission. Research on HIV and marriage in general takes two context-dependent strands: (i) marriage is protective of HIV; (ii) marriage is a risk factor for HIV. In polygamous unions early marriage is associated with increased vulnerability to HIV (Hervish & Feldman-Jacobs 2011). In locations where the HIV prevalence rate is higher in girls than boys it may be linked to the young age of marriage for girls and polygamy (Sauvain-Dugerdl & Thiriat 2009). In several West African countries adolescent girls have at least twice the rate of HIV infection compared to adolescent boys.

DHS data shows a high percentage of adolescent girls giving birth before age 16 in three out of four countries: 13% in Niger and Mali, 12% in Guinea. In Burkina Faso the rate is 4%; in Benin 5% and 8% in Cameroon (Neal 2009). Although very early pregnancy can have severe implications for a safe and healthy childbirth, and despite the fact that many communities are aware of this risk, early pregnancy (before 18) within marriage is not necessarily seen as problematic by families and communities, more a blessing, as it confers status and motherhood. However, some of the consequences of very early pregnancy, such as vesico-
vaginal fistula, confer lifelong adverse consequences not only for a girl’s health but also her social and economic status. A clinical review of risk factors for obstetric fistula found disparity in research data about obstetrical fistula patients with 8.9% to 86% of obstetrical fistula patients being teenagers (Tebeu et al. 2012). WHO data indicates that up to 65% of women with obstetrical fistula have developed the condition during adolescence. Pregnant adolescent girls are also have a relatively high risk of anaemia, malaria and post-partum haemorrhage (WHO online n.d).

Overburden of responsibilities and inability to cope in their new environment can negatively affect the wellbeing and psychosocial development of married adolescent girls, especially during pregnancy. The isolation and depression which can result from their early experience of marriage may also negatively impact their mental health.

Table 6: Maternal and Infant Mortality in seven countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births)</th>
<th>Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the latest DHS show high infant and child mortality ratios in same countries with high early marriage (Table 6). Research suggests that adolescent girls are slightly more at risk of dying in child birth than women aged 20-25 (Nove et al. 2014) but there are disparities between countries in the region. In Mali, literature suggests that girls giving birth before 15 years of age are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women giving birth between 20-30 years old (Unicef 2009). In addition, the report suggests that the likelihood of infants dying during their first year is 60% higher if the mother is below 18 years of age compared to mothers over 19.

2.5 Sphere of influence

We propose a sphere of influence that puts girls and their risk of marriage at the heart of the issue, in recognition of their rights as children, their agency and their potential. This diagram is intended to build on and complement earlier examples (such as ICRW 2014a). It presents influences and influencers at four distinct levels: (i) socio-political ideologies at the national and supra-national level; (ii) legislation, policies and systems; (iii) the Community; (iv) the Family; (v) the Girl. At each level, factors operate to affect a girl’s chance of marrying early (Figure 6).
Figure 6: Influencers and Influences on the risk of Child Marriage
3. Key findings on child marriage in four focal countries

This section compiles the findings from the literature review, interviews and secondary analysis of national Demographic and Health Survey data to reveal trends, drivers and risk factors associated with child marriage for each of the four focal countries of the study.

3.1 Burkina Faso

3.1.1 Overview
The literature review located more documentation on child marriage in Burkina Faso overall than any other country reviewed (Table 1). This may be a reflection of the significant, long-term presence of aid donors and international NGOs operating in the country, which is one of the poorest in the world, and its relative economic and civil stability. However, there is a more substantial body of literature and evidence on unmarried adolescents focused on premarital sexual initiation and the risk of early pregnancy (e.g. Biddlecom et al. 2008). Despite the fact that it is the only one of the four countries where some research has been conducted on the status and experiences of married adolescent girls, significant knowledge gaps remain in this area.

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country bordered by Mali to the north and Niger to the east. It is characterised by rapid population growth and a young age structure (Engebretsen & Kabore 2011). Approximately 52% of the population are under the age of 18. Over three-quarters of the population live in rural areas and work in agriculture. Unemployment is high (77% in 2004) and many men migrate for work. Rapid urbanisation is a major challenge. Sixty percent are Muslim with the remainder Catholic, Protestant or traditional/animist. There are over sixty ethnic groups the largest of which is the Mossi, as well as the semi-nomadic Peul (also called Fulani or Fulbe).

The country is divided into 13 regions and 45 administrative provinces. It has a partially decentralised governance structure with some powers devolved to the regions. The Ministry of Social Affairs & National Solidarity is mainly responsible for child protection issues.

The government ratified the CRC in 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1992 and CEDAW in 2005. It has domesticated provisions of these conventions into the Family Code (1989), in which Article 238 deals with marriage. This Article permits civil marriage only at 17 years for girls and 20 for boys, but authorises marriage from age 15 for girls under special, unspecified circumstances. According to Plan staff such circumstances include pregnancy, an increasing phenomenon among unmarried adolescent girls. In addition, the Code states that both partners must consent and decide together at the time of union whether the marriage is to be monogamous or polygamous (Brady et al. 2007). It also enshrines equality between the spouses. Under Burkinabé law forced marriage, levirate marriage and the exchange of bride price are illegal.

Thus, while some legal provisions are provided for equality and non-discrimination, others institutionalise women’s unequal status, including the age-differentiation in minimum marital ages and the ‘special’ allowance for girls’ marriage at 15. This is the legislative context in which Burkina has the 4th highest prevalence of child marriage in West Africa - the eighth highest in the world.

Marriage is a social norm for women in Burkina. In 2010 81% women aged 20-24 reported their status as currently married/cohabiting; 52% were married or in union by age 18 and
10% were married by 15 (UNICEF 2013). While the percentage of women aged 25-49 married by age 18 declined by 6% between 2003 and 2010, the proportion married by age 15 rose by 3% (Table 3).

3.1.2 Factors associated with child marriage

a. Region and residence

The prevalence and age at first marriage for women aged 20-24 varies considerably by region. The northern Sahel has the lowest median age at first marriage among women at 16 years, lower than the legal minimum age, while in the East the median age is 17.1 years and in the Centre including Ouagadougou it is 19.7 years – a range of nearly four years across the country. In nine out of 13 regions the median age at first marriage is lower than the internationally agreed minimum age of 18 years for marriage.

The East and Sahel regions have the highest proportion of currently married adolescent girls (aged 15-19). Among women in the East, 72% were married by age 18 of whom 20% were married by 15. In the Sahel, 76% were married by age 18 of whom 34% were married by 15.

Figure 7: Burkina Faso – women’s marital status by region

The youngest ages of first marriage are strongly associated with the overall prevalence of child marriage so that more women marry younger in the Sahel than anywhere else in the country. In every regions in which Plan works – East, Centre North and South West – the prevalence of child marriage is at least 50%.

Rurality is a risk factor for girls’ early marriage, contributing to a difference of over one year in all women’s mean age at first marriage, from 17.2 in rural areas to 18.6 in urban areas. There is a higher prevalence of child marriage in rural areas. In 2010 the proportion of women aged 20-24 living in rural areas and marrying under 18 was 43% compared to 8% for women in urban areas.
Girls begin marriage/cohabiting at a younger age in rural areas compared to urban areas. While the rural / urban dichotomy may be a fairly crude measure of residential difference as increasing numbers of families live in urban slums and rural small towns.

b. Religion and ethnicity
Muslim women make up 60% of the DHS sample in 2010 with Catholic and Protestant 26%. Among women aged 20-24 who are Muslim, 56% married by age 18.

The regions in which Plan operates are composed of different majority ethnic groups, namely: the Gourmatche (East); Mossi (Centre North); Lobi and Dagara (South West). There are links between ethnic group and religious belief but these are not simple. The Mossi mostly Muslim with sizeable proportion Catholic (25%). The Peul are also mostly Muslim, inhabiting the northern Sahel region as pastoralists. Gourmatché are mostly Catholic/Protestant with a sizeable proportion following Islam or Traditional/Animist faiths (20-25% each). Dagara mostly Catholic with proportion Traditional/Animist (30%); Lobi most Traditional/Animist with proportion Catholic.

Thus we can see that 41% Catholic women married by the age of 18, compared to 37% of Dagara but 72% of Gourmatché, indicating that Catholicism per se is not the only factor in the high proportion of early marriages. Similarly, 75% of the Fulfulde/Peul women aged 20-24 married by age 18, higher than the proportion of Muslim young women reporting early
marriage. Ethnicity seems to have an effect independent of religion on the age at first marriage.

c. Wealth
When considering wealth in association with child marriage it is important to bear in mind that current wealth is measured by the DHS as opposed to historic marriage experience so that, for women aged 20-24 who were married before age 15, their marriage predates their current wealth status by several years and could have changed in the intervening period. Thus it is at best a proxy measure.

Variation in marital status and age at marriage fluctuates across the poorest to mid-income families but is significantly better among the richest (highest wealth quintile) households, suggesting that the highest level of relative wealth is important in delaying marriage. The mean age at first marriage is 17 for the poorest girls rising to 17.5 for the fourth wealth quintile (‘richer’) but jumping to 18.7 for the richest.

Figure 10: Burkina Faso - women’s marital status by education and wealth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No education</th>
<th>Incomplete primary</th>
<th>Complete primary</th>
<th>Incomplete secondary</th>
<th>Complete secondary</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Richest</th>
<th>Richer</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Poorer</th>
<th>Poorest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Married &lt;15</td>
<td>Married &lt;18</td>
<td>Married &gt;18</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Married &lt;15</td>
<td>Married &lt;18</td>
<td>Married &gt;18</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Married &lt;15</td>
<td>Married &lt;18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. Education
Education from age 6 to 16 is compulsory and free by law for all children in Burkina. Education policy also allows for pregnant schoolgirls to stay in and return to school during pregnancy and after delivery. However in 2011 51% of the one million children out of primary school (6 to 11 years old age group) were girls. The adjusted female primary NER was 63% (GPI 0.95). At lower secondary level, the GER was just 31% for girls (GPI 0.85). 440,000 adolescent girls are estimated to be out of school (UNESCO 2014). While girls’ enrolment and attendance at primary school is increasing over time the rate of transition to secondary school remains low at 48% for girls and 53% for boys (UNESCO 2014).

In 2010, 63% of women aged 20-24 with no education were currently married, compared to 11.6% of women who had reached primary school. Among all women (20-24) with no education, 13.5% were married by 15, compared to 6% of women who had started primary school. Some education seems to have a positive effect on age at marriage compared to no education at all.
The expansion of access to education is generally associated with increased enrolment and delayed age at first marriage among girls. Among women aged 20-49 in 2010 the median age at first marriage increased by nearly a year with the attainment of primary education, from 17.6 years among those with no education to 18.5 for those with primary schooling.

The associations between child marriage and education are compounded by residence, region and wealth. Living in a rural areas significantly reduces your chance of having an education: 87% of women aged 15-49 in rural areas stated that they had no education, compared to less than half (40%) of urban women. In the Sahel region, where there is the highest prevalence of child marriage, 92% of women reported having received no education, compared to 89% in the East, 83% in the South West and 37% in the Centre. Despite purported ‘free’ schooling, 92% of the poorest women report having no education compared to 37% of the richest women (again, the shift is particularly dramatic at the highest wealth quintile).

What this suggests is the critical and sustained interrelationship between residence, wealth and education on child marriage, with rurality, poverty and no education combining to produce the highest prevalence of child marriage and the youngest ages at first marriage. This is not to say that child marriage does not affect girls living in urban areas with primary education or relatively more wealth - it does. In fact, the outcome of child marriage only decreases significantly among the wealthiest citizens with secondary or higher education.

e. Sexual and reproductive health

Sexual debut is getting younger and early pregnancy outside of marriage is increasing among in and out-of-school adolescent girls. However, the majority of all women (55%) report sexual debut at the age of first union. In 2010, the mean age at first sex among women aged 20-24 was 17 compared to 20 among women aged 40-44. The average age at sexual debut is declining gradually over time in all regions and across rural and urban dwellers. But, it is declining more sharply among young urban women, indicating a possible growing trend among urban adolescent girls of sex before marriage.

Contraceptive prevalence is low with 15% of women using any modern method of contraception. The adolescent fertility rate remains high at 115 live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 (2012). An estimated 72% of women give birth in a health facility but maternal and infant mortality rates are high at 400 deaths/100,000 women and 78/1,000 live births.
The graph above presents the median age at first marriage, sexual debut and childbirth among all women age 20-49 in 2010. In the majority – eight out of 13 – of regions the median age at sexual debut is younger than the median age at marriage. However, in the Sahel, East, Centre North, Centre South and Boucle de Mouhoun marriage occurs very slightly before or at the same time as sexual debut at a median age no older than 17.9 years. Where child marriage is prevalent and the age of marriage youngest (Sahel and the East) sexual debut and marriage occur at exactly the same age and, in the East, first birth is within 14 months. These characteristics coincide with the presence of the Peul and Gourmâché ethnic groups in the Sahel and East regions respectively who practice early marriage and childbearing (Population Council 2009).

f. Gender inequality and discrimination
Child marriage continues in a context of inequality and discrimination for all women. Burkinabé girls’ mobility is highly controlled, though it varies according to marital status. Their movements in the community, their access to resources such as land, and their employment in the formal sector are all restricted (Brady et al. 2007).

Perception of marriage
Marriage is a social norm for Burkinabé girls and motherhood it assumed consequent. For some, the marital process begins at birth when they are ‘promised’ to a family (Kaboré & Yaro 2008). Among the Peul around one in five girls marry before age 15 and some are promised at around ten years of age (Brady et al. 2007; Population Council 2009). The girl lives at her in-laws house until the marriage and her schooling, if any, is provided for by her mother-in-law. Marriage is at the core of Peul children’s family education (Population Council 2009; Yaro & Dia 2013). The notion of the bride as a ‘gift’ and child marriage as a debt repayment system also persists including in the East region where this gift is seen to strengthen social links between families (Ouedraogo & Wood 2006; Kabore et al. 2009).

Bride price
Bride price, where the groom and/or groom’s family pays for the bride in cash or kind, is commonly practiced throughout Burkina despite being prohibited by law. Many people are not aware of the legislation. Families attach conditions to a proposed groom who seeks
marriage to which the groom must comply for recognition of the marriage by the family and the community. These conditions tend to incorporate money and goods (Plan Burkina Faso, personal communication 2014). In the East the family or groom who will receive the bride may work on the girls’ family fields every year until the wedding and give regular gifts of sheep and other items over the years during religious and traditional festivals. An estimated 80% of people support bride price practices (Kabore et al. 2009).

Sudden or long-term economic hardship can perpetuate girls’ early marriage because the bride price paid to the girls’ family is likely to be higher when the girl is younger and a virgin (Kabore & Yaro 2008). The family may suddenly, or over time, feel that the need for the bride wealth is significant. In addition a married daughter becomes the responsibility of her husband and is one less mouth to feed for her natal family. However, economic hardship can also delay marriage in situations where girls and /or groom’s families do not have enough resources to receive or pay the bride price. The manifestation of the risk of poverty will vary by community and over time and be contingent on disaster, conflict or political instability.

**Bride kidnapping**

Bride kidnapping is a phenomena associated with child marriage in Burkina. Research on kidnapping in the East found that one in every ten women aged 14-25 had been kidnapped with a higher prevalence in urban areas and Komondjoari and Gnagna provinces. 52.3% of kidnapped women and girls were abducted before age 18 in Kompienga, Komondjoari, Gourma and Tapoa (Ouedraogo et. al. 2012). The Population Council (2009) attributes the practice mostly to Gourmantché and Mossi communities. There are indications that many kidnappings today are arranged in order to avoid forced marriage and enable girls to choose their husband and formalise love unions (Ouedraogo et. al, 2012). For others, bride kidnapping is a symbol of strength, maturity and bravery. In provinces in the South West bride kidnapping may be viewed as a symbol of bravery (Apidon 2011) or sexual vengeance.

Bride kidnapping also has a transnational dimension with child brides being trafficked between Burkina, Niger, Benin and Togo (Ouadaogo, D. et al., 2013). Ouedraogo et. al (2012) found that although the wide majority of respondents did not approve of bride kidnapping, twice as much men approve than women and that approval was more common within animist confession communities.

**Polygamy**

Polygamy is a feature of many marriages, especially in rural areas, and the age differences between the husband and wife tend to be larger in polygamous unions and when the bride is younger. More than one-third of married girls find themselves in polygamous unions as second or third wives married to much older men (Brady et al. 2007).

Nearly half of all currently married women across all regions (except the Centre and Ougadougou) are in a polygamous unions, with nearly one fifth in a marriage with at least two co-wives. The Centre-West region has the highest proportion (26%) of currently married women living with two or more co-wives. Relative to other regions polygamy is not a strong feature of married women’s lives in the Sahel region however – here only one third of women are in a union with one or more co-wife.

**Traditional socio-cultural practices**

Traditional socio-cultural practices, such as the *Lito* among the Yaana also contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities between men and women around marriage. *Lito* is an exchange
of two sisters between two men across two families (Population Council 2009). Although such practices are increasingly rare, they have contributed to maintaining child marriage.

Other practices, such as the Kiugu festival in the Centre-North, perpetuate gender discrimination and the idea that women can accept sex when part of an economic transaction. During the Kiugu, men can have sex with any girls or women provided that they pay an amount decided by the woman/girl. Although sexual intercourse cannot lead to a wedding when taking place during the Kiugu, the festival may put pressure on poorer young girls to have sex early, precipitating marriage by fear of dishonour or when girls fall pregnant as a result of their participation in the festival (Apidon 2011).

**Female Genital Cutting**
Despite its illegality, 76% of women are believed to have undergone one type of female genital cutting (Unicef 2010 MICS4). Some incidents have led to prosecutions, fines and imprisonment. There is very little evidence, however, on any associations between age, type and experience of FGC and child marriage although the prevalence of both is high.

Orphanhood is a feature of life for a small but significant proportion of girls: data indicates that one quarter of rural girls and more urban girls have only one living parent, while 10% of 6,000 adolescents surveyed for the 2004 Burkina National Survey on Adolescents’ were orphans. The associations between orphanhood and early marriage are complex and variable but one recent analysis (Chae 2013) indicates that orphans are not a higher risk group for early marriage.

**3.1.3 Summary**
Marriage is a social norm for Burkinabé women but the variance in age at first marriage is significant across socio-demographic markers. The median age at first marriage ranges from 16 in the Sahel to 19.7 in the Centre. In nine out of 13 regions the median age at first marriage is under 18 years. Among women aged 20-24 in 2010, 63% with no education were currently married compared to 12% with primary schooling; 43% living in rural areas married by age 18 compared to 8% living in urban areas. The intersections of religion and ethnicity indicate that religious affiliation per se is not solely driving child marriage. 72% of Gourmatché and 75% of Peul women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18 and ethnicity seems to have a significant effect on age at marriage independent of religion. Rurality, poverty, ethnicity and schooling combine to alter the risk of child marriage for girls.

The majority of women (55%) report sexual debut at first union. However, sexual debut is getting younger, especially among young urban girls, and early pregnancy is increasing. In the East sexual debut and marriage occur at the same age and first birth just over one year later. Bride price is commonly practiced despite being prohibited by law. Gendered attitudes towards the bride as a ‘gift’, practice of polygamy and bride kidnapping, especially among the Gourmantché and Mossi, reinforce discrimination against women in marital practices.
3.2 Guinea

3.2.1 Overview
Guinea is extremely underserved by research and evidence on child marriage, beyond regional aggregations and summary profiles. This is in spite of it having the 5th highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. An estimated 63% women aged 20-24 are married by 18 and a fifth (20%) are married by age 15 (UNICEF 2013).

The government ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1999. It has domesticated provisions for child marriage into the Civil Code (1983) and the Child Code (2011) which recognise civil marriages among men and women over the age of 18 who give consent. Religious, not civil, marriage is however generally more important to Guineans.

Guinea is a predominantly Islamic country - 85% of the population are Muslim. The majority of Guineans (65%) live in rural areas. There are three main ethnic groups, which are politised and regionalised: the Peul make up about 40% of the population mainly in the central areas; the Mandinka about 30% around the east; and the Soussou about 20% in the west. Guinea has a youthful population: approximately 53% are under 18 years of age and the median age of the total population is 18.3 years. Social and political unrest, natural and other disasters, such as the contemporary Ebola epidemic, mark the country. Institutional weaknesses at all levels coupled with problems with law enforcement are critical issues.

Guinea is divided into four natural regions - Lower, Middle, Upper and Forest – or eight administrative regions with 33 prefectures. Upper Guinea borders Mali and has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the country at 76%. Child marriage is common throughout Guinea, but its prevalence varies by around 30% between Conakry and regions in Upper Guinea. In Forest Guinea, where Plan works, the prevalence of child marriage is around 65%.

Nationally, the median age at first marriage among women aged 15-49 was 17.2 in 2012, up slightly from 16.2 in 2005. Women living in rural areas are overall more likely to be married by age 18 than their urban counterparts. Lack of education and poverty are also associated with child marriage (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Polygamy is prohibited by law but almost half of currently married women (48%) are in a polygamous union (DHS Guinea 2012). There have been reports of girls married as early as 11 years old in the Fouta Djalon and Forest regions (Plan 2011).

As in Burkina, men migrate throughout Guinea and to neighbouring countries to work and study. This migration reportedly contributes to young Guinean girls marrying abroad and non-Guinean girls marrying in Guinea. Migration is seen by parents both as a chance for the child to widen opportunities and have a better life and as a possible economic return despite the risks linked to external migration (ACP 2012).

In addition to child marriage, Guinean girls experience many additional rights violations including exposure to domestic abuse, corporal punishment in schools, sexual and labour exploitation and female genital cutting.
3.2.2 Risk factors associated with child marriage

a. Region and residence

The majority of Guinean women aged 20-24 are currently married/cohabiting (an estimated 74% in 2012). Age at first cohabitation ranges from 10 to 36 with an average age of 16.7. 30% of all ever married women were married by age 15; 67% by age 18.

**Figure 12: Guinea – women’s marital status by region**

The median age at marriage ranges by region from 16 years in Labé to over 19 in Conakry. It is lower in all regions, except Conakry, than the legal minimum age of marriage. In addition to Labé, girls in Faranah, Kankan and Boké are highly likely to married by the age of 17.

For the N’Zérékoré region, where Plan operates, 21% were married by age 15 and an additional 36% married between age 15 to 18, totalling 57% married as children under the age of 18. 26% reported being currently unmarried.

Rurality is a risk factor for child marriage in Guinea: the mean age at first marriage all women is over a year younger for women living in rural areas compared to their urban counterparts (16.3 compared to 17.7 years). Among women aged 20-24 living in rural areas, 28.5% were married by age 15 compared to 12% of women living in urban areas.

**Figure 13: Guinea - women’s marital status by residence**
b. Religion and ethnicity
As the vast majority of Guineans are Muslim, and sample sizes for other religious groups are very small, analysis is done for ethnic groups only. Indicatively, 52% Muslim women aged 20-24 report being married before age 18; the figure for the small sample of young Christian women is 48%.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Peul marry earlier on average than other ethnic groups (Van Rossem & Gage 2009). DHS data indicates that among Peul women aged 20-24, 59% married by age 18. This compares to 54% of Malinké and 37% of Guérzé young women. In N’Zérékoré the majority ethnic groups are the Malinké and Guérzé with smaller groups of Kissi and others. The Peul are predominant in Labé region. The vast majority of the Malinké and Peul are Muslim; Guérzé majority Christian.

Figure 14: Guinea - women’s marital status by ethnicity

![Graph showing marital status by ethnicity](image)

c. Wealth
Among the wealthiest women aged 20-24, 25% married before the age of 18, compared to 75% of the poorest women. However, wealth barely makes a difference going up the quintiles except for the wealthiest tier of women - even among the fourth highest wealth quintile of women half (46%) married before 18. For the wealthiest women, marriage is delayed by an average of at least two years. Among the wealthiest women with secondary or higher education the median age at marriage above the legal minimum age of 18.

Figure 15: Guinea - women’s marital status by education and wealth

![Graph showing marital status by education and wealth](image)
d. Education
Primary education is compulsory in Guinea but for the school year ending 2011 girls’ Net Enrolment Rate was 76% (GPI 0.84). 70% of children out of primary school are girls. In 2009, the primary cohort completion rate for girls was a meagre 38%. Only around a third of girls are enrolled in lower secondary school so that there were 243,000 out-of-school adolescent girls in 2012.

In 2012, the mean single years of education for all women was estimated at a little under three years, and the majority of all women (67%) reported having no education. The median age at first marriage among women aged 20-49 in 2012 was youngest among women with no education compared to women with some education. Completing primary schooling increases the median age of marriage by 1.2 years. There is anecdotal reports of families keeping married girls at home until completion of their secondary education (Plan 2011).

e. Sexual and reproductive health
Child marriage is perpetuated by parents’ fear of pre-marital pregnancy, which is exacerbated from puberty onwards (Barry & Tremblay 2006). In three regions sexual debut coincides with age at first union while in others it occurs before marriage. Nationally, the median age of sexual debut is 16.5 years and 17.2 years for marriage. The earliest age of sexual debut is among girls in rural areas of Central Guinea, specifically in Kankan and Labé provinces which both have a median age of first sex of 15.8 years of age.

Figure 16: Guinea – women (20-49) median age at first marriage, sex and birth

This indicates that in Guinea girls are at risk of pregnancy outside marriage. Early pregnancies may therefore be a factor that precipitate a union in some of these contexts. The delay between sexual debut and marriage is an average of seven months and no longer than 15 months (Conakry). The fact that the average delay is less than the standard gestation period suggests at least two hypotheses: that sexual initiation occurs within the context of engagement or the process of marital union, or that sex leads rapidly to a marital union, possibly linked to parental fears of dishonour. Further investigation of the age of girls’ first sexual partners and trends in male age at first marriage, by region, would help to consolidate this emerging picture of sex before marriage in Guinea.

Use of contraception among married women is extremely low at 4.6%. Less than half of all births (40%) take place in a health facility. The infant mortality rate is 76 per 1,000. The adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19) remains high but is declining slowly over time from 145 in 2009 to 131 in 2012.
Men head Guinean households and make most of the decisions regarding the household and the family. On marriage, fathers and men take decisions but mothers can take a role in the process and act as the mediator in negotiations (Barry & Tremblay 2006). However, there is very little concept of ‘early’ marriage as the bride is given when her natal family believe her to be ready, usually closely around menarche. Puberty and menarche are significant risk factors for marriage, with girls whose menarche comes naturally early being at high risk of very early marriage.

Intergenerational trends
There is anecdotal evidence, including from Plan staff, of intergenerational behaviour and the transmission of values in the practice of child marriage with girls whose mothers married young being more likely to also marry early, especially in Middle Guinea. Further, the engagement of young boys and girls may be maintained in large size endogamic communities (Barry & Tremblay 2006).

Bride price
Bride price is common practice and tends to be oriented around a cash settlement of upwards of 5,000 CFA. Plan staff suggest that educational attainment is not a factor in the bride price but a girl with a higher level of education may have more negotiating power within marriage.

Traditional socio-cultural practices
Traditional socio-cultural practices, such as sororate marriage, are maintained in some parts of the country (Plan, 2011). Virginity at marriage is understood to be highly valued in many communities, and may be associated with early marriage and the harmful practice of female genital cutting. FGC is believed to enhance marriageability by controlling women’s sexuality and preserving virginity (Gage & Van Rossem 2009). FGC may precede initiation rites associated with puberty which are followed by marriage. However, findings from a 1999 study on the link between FGC and marriage found that in practice FGC has no effect on women’s age at first marriage or perceived marriageability (ibid.).

Migration
The migration of Guinean girls following their husbands and of foreign brides entering Guinea is believed to be a discrete component of the phenomenon of marriage in Guinean society (ACP 2012).

3.2.3 Summary
74% of Guinean women aged 20-24 are currently married/cohabiting. The median age at marriage ranges from 16 in Labé to over 19 in Conakry. It is lower in all regions, except Conakry, than the legal minimum age of marriage (18). In N’Zérékoré 57% young women married by age 18. 28.5% of rural women were married by age 15 compared to 12% of urban women. Wealth only makes a significant difference to age at first marriage for the wealthiest for whom marriage is delayed by around two years. Only among the wealthiest women with secondary or higher education is the median age at marriage above 18.

Girls are at risk of pregnancy outside marriage because sexual debut tends to occur slightly before marriage. There is anecdotal evidence of intergenerational behaviour and the transmission of values in the practice of child marriage. Bride price, FGC, sororate marriage and migration are trends that require particular investigation in the Guinean context, as they seem to have a role in perpetuating child marriage and discrimination.
3.3 Mali

3.3.1 Overview
Mali is a landlocked country bordering Guinea to the south, Burkina Faso to the south east and Niger to the north east. It is one of the 25 poorest countries in the world with a very young and predominantly Islamic population: 54% are under the age of 18 and 95% are Muslim. The population median age is 16 years old.

Mali experienced rapid economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s and enjoyed stability and democracy until the inception of ethno-religious unrest in 2012. It remains a predominantly rural country with a small proportion of nomadic peoples including the Tuareg in the north. The Bambara are the largest ethnic group in the country comprising around one third of the population. In common with Guinea, the Mandinka and the Peul are also significant ethnic groups in Mali.

The government ratified the CRC in 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1998 and acceded to CEDAW in 2000. It has domesticated provisions of these conventions into the Personal and Family Code (2011) after much debate and controversy regarding the minimum age of marriage. Currently, the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 for girls, or 16 with parental consent, and 21, or 18, for boys. This Code discriminates against women in most aspects of family life and perpetuate marital inequality (Amnesty International 2012). Bride price is recognised by law, wives must ‘obey’ their husbands, and polygyny is accepted. Evidence indicates that this Code and other national and international legislative frameworks are not well known (Kante 2009; Population Council 2004). Marriages are regularly conducted for girls at or before age 16 with, or without, parental consent. Shari’a and customary law also operate in Mali.

Mali is divided into eight regions each of which has a governor. The Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs and the Family and its decentralised authorities are primarily responsible for monitoring marriage practices. In the context of a highly contested law, Mali has the 6th highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. In 2010, 55% of women aged 20-24 were married by age 18 and 15% by age 15 (UNICEF 2013), the 3rd highest in West Africa after Niger and Guinea. In 2006, the median age at first marriage among women aged 15-49 years was 16.6.

Rates of child marriage have been declining over time but remain high in combination with multiple other violations of girls’ rights. The harmful tradition of female genital cutting is very common: an estimated 80% women have undergone one type of FGC, although the prevalence varies across ethnic groups.

3.3.2 Risk factors associated with child marriage
In 2012-3, among all women, the mean age at first marriage was 17.5 years, with a range from ten to 48 years of age. An estimated 24% of all women married under the age of 15 and an additional 34% married between 15 to 18 years of age. 43% adolescent girls aged 15-19 reported their status as currently married/cohabiting at this time.

The literature on Mali emphasises three major risk factors for child marriage: lack of education, poverty and rurality. While these are significant associations that complement global data, there are several drivers and complexities specific to the Malian context that deserve attention and are described below.
a. Region and residence

The prevalence of child marriage varies by region from 87% in the western Kayes region to 54% in Bamako. In 2006, Kayes region had the lowest median age at first marriage nationally at 15.7 compared to a national median of 16.6 years. Research conducted in the Tombouctou region (Kante 2009) found girls married at eight years old, with 19% of girls surveyed were married between the ages of eight to 14.

In Plan’s operational areas, the median age and prevalence of marriage varies: Koulikoro has below national median age at first marriage of 15.9 years; while the median age in Ségou is 17.1 years. For Plan this means that the organisation is dealing with different scenarios of child marriage across locations.

Among women aged 20-24 in Kayes region, 71% reported marriage before the age of 18. In Koulikoro this equivalent proportion was 61%.

Figure 17: Mali – women’s marital status by region

Data indicates that rurality is a risk factor for child marriage. The median age at first marriage among all women in 2006 was higher by nearly a year in urban compared to rural areas. While in rural areas this age has been increasing slightly over time, in urban areas the previous two survey rounds show a new decline towards earlier age at first marriage, from 17.8 years of age in 2001 to the latest 17.2 in 2006. This trend is atypical and requires further investigation.

In 2012-13 among women in rural areas aged 20-24, 66% reported marriage by age 18; among women of the same age in urban areas, 44% reported marriage by age 18.
Research into the sexual transitions in Mali, which investigated age at sexual debut in different locations, also found that 'differences between rural and urban life patterns are fading in younger cohorts' (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al. 2008), which may be what we are seeing with regard to age at marriage.

b. Religion and ethnicity

Koulikoro region is comprised mainly of the Bambara ethnic group while Kayes region contains Sarakole/Soninke/Mrka, Malinke and Peul, all of whom are majority Muslim. There is very little variation in women’s reported age at first marriage between ethnic groups – indeed the average variation is only a few months. In common with research on sexual transitions, religiosity is believed to play a significant but not systematic role (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al. 2013).

Survey research in Tombouctou (Kante 2009) found that the prevalence of child marriage varied by ethnic group from 53% amongst Dire, 33% amongst Niafunke and 28% among Rharous; the proportions married very early (under 15) varied in parallel from 22% among Dire to 20% among Rharous and 15% among Niafunke. Kante states that, among these three ethnic groups in the region, most marriages are a request from the family of the man, not a promise from the girls' families and that the majority of people perceived that the appropriate age for marriage is between 14 and 17 years of age.

c. Wealth

Unlike other countries, girls from the lowest wealth quintiles are not necessarily marrying earlier than the second, middle or fourth quintiles. DHS data from 2006 shows that, in fact, girls from the fourth quintile marry slightly earlier than those from the lowest quintile.

Among the richest women aged 20-24 in 2012-13, 38% reported being married by age 18, altering for each wealth quintile to 30%, 36%, 66% and 70% at each point. Again, there not a smooth decline as the proportion of the richest women marrying young is higher than the fourth quintile. This is probably not explained by variability in sample size, as they are more or less equal across quintiles; it therefore encourages further research.
d. Education

Education is compulsory for nine years (6 years primary plus three years lower secondary) for children aged seven to 16 during which time it is, in principle, free of charge. However, in 2011 the adjusted female Net Enrolment Rate was 63% (GPI 0.87). 56% out-of primary school children - or 476,000 - are girls. Of those girls who do enrol in primary school, less than half complete the full six years. In 2011 the cohort completion rate for girls was 43%.

Fewer girls than boys enrol in lower secondary (GPI 0.75). In the same year, the gross enrolment rate for girls to lower secondary was 45%, and there were 317,000 adolescent girls out-of-school. One of the main barriers to retention and causes of premature drop-out among girls is their late age at entry to the education system. Starting school after the official entry age of seven, can result in girls experiencing puberty and becoming at risk of marriage before they have completed primary school.

In 2012-13 the mean single years of schooling for all women was estimated at just under two years, and the majority of women (75%) reported having no education. One research study (Diarra 2013) suggests that the length of education plays a role in Mali as there is one year difference at first marriage between girls with primary and secondary education and four years for those with tertiary education.

e. Sexual and reproductive health

In 2012 the adolescent birth rate was 176 live births per 1,000 girls, and had declined only gradually over the previous five years from 188 in 2006. This is the second highest rate in the world among countries with available data.
In all regions except Gao female first sex precedes marriage by around four months on average. This short time delay indicates a very close relationship in girls’ lives between sexual debut and marriage in the majority of regions. Kayes and Koulikoro have among the lowest median ages across all transitions. However, in these two regions and all others, age at first birth seems to be quite significantly delayed and disassociated with marriage, with an average delay between marriage and first birth of 24 months. This is the longest delay of all our countries of interest and its significance and drivers require further investigation.

Changes in sexual transitions are slowly taking place as younger women initiate sex and marry later than their older counterparts (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al. 2008). However, the sexual transition takes place relatively early in Malian women’s lives compared to other West African young women. The differences between the sexes in age at sexual debut also appears to be reducing.

f. Gender inequality and discrimination
Men are the head of Malian households. Women are generally subservient, under the influence of men and tradition. In marriage, women lack mobility, decision-making power and authority. According the latest DHS, less than half (48%) currently married women believe it is justifiable for a woman to refuse sex with her husband if she knows he has a sexually transmitted disease.

Research has suggested common reasons for child marriage: to avoid illegitimate pregnancy (52%) followed by to educate the girl (20%) (Kante 2009). Regarding who makes the decisions about marriages, 52% responded that it would be the father with other men, 27% said the father alone and only 19% said the mother and father together.

Bride price
Bride price is a common component of the marital process. It varies according to ethnicity, wealth, community and over time but is retained in the majority of unions. Women, including the potential bride, tend not to be included in bride price negotiations, which are led by men, expect perhaps in urban areas in association with increased levels of education and empowerment among women and girls. Discussions are however held separately between men and women.
Polygamy
There appears to be a link between polygyny and spouses’ age. Younger brides being more likely to be 2nd, 3rd or 4th wife, the age difference between husbands and their young wives will be greater (Population Council 2004).

In an analysis of the latest DHS (Diarra 2013) researchers found that when women can choose their husband, their age at first marriage is higher. In addition, women whose spouse works in the education or management sectors, also had a higher age at first marriage by at least one year compared to women whose husband’s worked in other sectors.

Traditional socio-cultural practices
Cultural practices such as force feeding of young women to enhance their marital attractiveness and prepare them for marriage are reported in some parts of Northern Mali. There is very little data on this, but prevalence is low and seems to be declining (Equality Now 2014).

3.2.3 Summary
The prevalence of child marriage varies by region from 87% in the western Kayes region to 54% in Bamako. In 2012-13 among women in rural areas aged 20-24, 66% reported marriage by age 18; among women of the same age in urban areas, 44% reported marriage by age 18. There are indications of a trend towards earlier age at first marriage in urban areas. The change in the proportion of girls marrying before 18 is not smooth across wealth quintiles: a higher proportion of the wealthiest women marry early compared to the next wealth quintile.

Three-quarters of women report having no education. One of the main barriers to retention and causes of premature drop-out among girls is their late age at entry to the education system. The sexual transition takes place relatively early in Malian women’s lives (around 15-16 years of age) compared to other West African young women. There seems to be a close association in girls’ lives between sexual debut and marriage. Bride price and polygamy are common, and men tend to lead the decisions about marriage.
3.4 Niger

3.4.1 Overview
Niger has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. An estimated 75% of women aged 20-24 are married by age 18 and 36% are married by age 15 (UNICEF 2013).

The Nigerien government ratified the CRC in 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1999 and acceded to CEDAW in 2004. It has domesticated provisions of these conventions into the recently amended Civil Code (2004), which enshrines an unambiguous legal minimum age of marriage of 15 for girls and 18 for boys. Both parties are expected to give their full and free consent and register the marriage. A law has been proposed to increase the minimum age for girls to 18 but it has yet to be adopted.

Customary and Shari’a law have a very strong influence in Niger including on the process of marriage. Many families chose to marry their children under customary or religious law, in part because the girl’s age is not requested. Determining children’s ages is a major problem due to the paucity of birth registrations. While 64% of children under 5 years-old have had their birth registered, only a third (29%) have a birth certificate. (DHS 2012) Anecdotal evidence from Plan staff suggests that, in any case, most marriage ceremonies are not registered by the local authority.

Niger is a landlocked country divided into eight regions and characterised by poverty, vulnerability, gender inequality and periodic humanitarian crises including severe food shortages. 56% of the population are under 18 years of age, the highest proportion of the four focal countries. 98% of Nigeriens are Muslim and the majority live in rural areas. The Haoussa are the dominant ethnic group with smaller communities of Tuareg and Peul.

According the latest DHS figures (2012) 61% girls aged 15-19 are currently in a union (compared to 3% men), increasing to 90% among 20-24 year old women (compared to 29% men). The median age at first marriage among women is 15.7 years, a marginal increase from the 2005 figure of 15.5 years. This data indicates that girls are married to men significantly older than them. There has been very little change over time.

In addition to child marriage, corporal punishment is lawful and endemic in schools and the home. Almost half (46%) of women aged 15-19 believe it is justified for a husband to beat his wife if she argues with him and over one third believe that wife beating is justified if she refuses sex, goes out without asking or neglects the children (DHS 2012). The proportions in each category increase with age for the first four age groups.

3.4.2 Risk factors
a. Region and residence
The median age at first marriage ranges by four years across the different regions of Niger, from over 19 years of age in Niamey to under 16 in Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder in the south. In Tillabéri and Dosso, Plan operational areas, women’s median age of marriage are 16.2 and 16.3 respectively.

In 2012, 88% of all women aged 20-24 were currently married/cohabiting. The age at first cohabitation/marriage ranged from nine to 40 years among. 31% women were married by age 15 and an additional 50% were married between ages 15 to 18.
Among women aged 20-24, a small and unique proportion reported marriage before the age of ten, which merits further investigation. Among women aged 20-24 in Dosso, 73% report being married before age 18; in Tillabéri the figure is similar at 75%.

Across the two latest survey rounds (2006 and 2012), women’s median age at marriage appears to have changed more for urban dwellers compared to rural residents. This indicates that the pace of positive change towards later marriage is faster in urban areas, although the direction of change, towards later marriage, is happening later in both locations.

b. Religion and ethnicity
No data is available in the 2012 DHS on either religion or ethnicity.

c. Wealth
The wealthiest women experience marriage later than primary educated and poorer women – the delay is almost two years compared to the fourth wealth quintile. However, even among the richest 20-24 year olds, 51% reported marrying before the age of 18. This compares to 85% of women in the mid-wealth quintile and 83% among the poorest. As in Mali, there is not a continual decline from the wealthiest to the poorest but variability across quintiles which merits investigation.
d. Education
Over 545,000 girls are out of school in Niger – 57% of the total number of primary school age children out of school. In the school year ending 2012, the adjusted female primary NER was 60% (GPI 0.84). In the previous academic year the primary cohort completion rate for girls was one third (31%). Unsurprisingly given the primary school data, girls’ gross enrolment at secondary school is a paltry 17% (GPI 0.69).

In 2012, the mean number of years of schooling for all women was 1.3 with the majority (80%) reporting having had no education. In Tillabéri, 79% women reported no education; with a further 13% reporting incomplete primary respectively. 64% 15-19 year olds have no education compared to 86% 40-44 year olds.

Among women aged 20-24 with no education, 84% were married by age 18, of whom a third were married by 15.

Figure 23: Niger – women’s marital status by wealth and education

![Graph showing marital status by wealth and education](image)

- **Unmarried**
- **Married <15**
- **Married <18**
- **Married >18**

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e. Sexual and reproductive health
Niger has both the highest total fertility rate in the world at an average of seven children per woman and the highest adolescent birth rate in the world at 205 live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

In 2012, most women (57%) reported their age at sexual debut as the same as their age at first marriage. Between different age groups, there is a decline in mean age at sexual debut, and a rural-urban difference, with women aged 20-24 in rural areas having a mean age at sexual debut of 15.6 compared to 18.3 among young women in urban locations.

Figure 24 below shows that in 2012 for all women, regardless of their region of residence, the median age at first sex is the same as or later than the age at marriage. This is a similar trend as for Burkina, but here the ages are much lower. There is very little sex before wedlock. Nationally, the median age at first marriage is 15.8 and for sex is 15.9 years. In Dosso, they are exactly the same (16.3 years), while in Tillabéri marriage occurs at 16.2 and sexual debut at 16.4. This indicates that there are two critical transitions that are closely associated, with sex outside marriage being relatively uncommon.

From this data, first birth happens on average at least two years after marriage and sexual debut, and no earlier than 17.5 years of age. The median age at first birth nationally is 18.5 years.
f. Gender inequality and discrimination

Under customary law and widespread practice men are considered to be the head of the family and women should obey them. Among currently married women, 36% were in a polygamous union in 2012, the majority of whom had one co-wife. Spousal age differences are large, with an average nine years difference between men and women’s median age at first marriage (a rounded 16 years of age for women compared to 25 for men). This is likely to compound power differentials in the household detrimental to girls and women.

Bride price

The bride price is a common phenomenon and generally consists of money from the groom or groom’s family. A girl with higher levels of education may well fetch a higher bride price, but this can also be influenced by the community and other socio-economic factors including the future husband’s wealth. Cousin marriage may also serve to strengthen family ties. Upon moving to her husband’s home, the bride takes a trousseau, consisting of clothes, and material assets that her family deems necessary for married life. Her natal family expect never to have to support her again.

Migration

Early marriage is also affected by migration patterns, especially of men, for work or as a result of instability. Anecdotal evidence describes men – especially wealthier, older men from Nigeria, Ghana or Benin who want more children - arranging marriages with families. Families are driven by poverty, especially during crises, to agree the transaction (IRIN 2009). Often, the girl’s first view of her husband is after she has crossed the border. Nigerien men who move for work may also arrange marriages outside of their natal regions for a variety of reasons.

3.2.3 Summary

The median age at first marriage ranges from over 19 years of age in Niamey to under 16 in Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder. In 2012, 88% of all women aged 20-24 were currently married/cohabiting. Across the two latest survey rounds (2006 and 2012), women’s median age at marriage appears to have changed more for urban dwellers compared to rural residents. This indicates that the pace of positive change towards later marriage is faster in urban areas. The wealthiest women experience marriage later than primary educated and poorer women – the delay is almost two years compared to the fourth wealth quintile. Among women aged 20-24 with no education, 84% were married by age 18, of whom a third
were married by 15. In 2012, most women (57%) reported their age at sexual debut as the same as their age at first marriage. There is very low prevalence of sex before marriage. Nationally, the median age at first marriage is 15.8 and for sex is 15.9 years. First birth happens much later, around two years after sexual debut. Over one third of married women are in polygamous unions. Bride price is a common phenomenon and shifting migration trends are affecting the practices of marriage in Niger and across its borders.
3.5 Other countries

3.5.1 Benin
Scant evidence from Benin indicates that the girls in rural areas are more likely than urban residents to be affected by early marriage. Women who are married as children are also much more likely to be married to older men, and girls who marry very young (under the age of 15) are more likely to accept domestic abuse (Jensen & Thornton 2003). Exchange and kidnapping are common marriage-related practices (US State Department 2012).

Data from the latest DHS (2011-12) indicates that the median age at first marriage among all women aged 20-49 is just under 20 years of age. This is reduced by at least one year for the poorest women, women living in rural areas, and those with no education.

3.5.2 Cameroon
Data from the latest DHS (2011) indicates that the median age at first marriage among all women aged 20-49 is 18.7 years of age, reduced by over two years to around age 16 for the poorest girls and those with no education.

3.5.3 Togo
In Togo the prevalence of child marriage is high in urban areas (Unicef MICS 2010). Data for the latest DHS (2013) was not yet fully available at the time of this review. Data from the previous DHS (1998) indicates that the median age at first marriage among all women aged 20-49 was 19 years of age. This age reduced by less than a year for the poorest women and girls with no education, indicating much less variation by socio-economic status than Cameroon and Benin.

Figure 25: Benin, Cameroon & Togo – women (20-49) median age at first marriage by selected socio-economic variables
4. Efforts to end child marriage

4.1 Regional interventions

This chapter describes governmental and non-governmental organisations and agencies who implementing activities directly or indirectly linked to child marriage in the region or at national level. It outlines Plan National Offices work related to child marriage to date, provides some examples of interesting practices within and beyond Plan, and offers a rapid assessment of strengths, weakness and gaps in existing approaches and documentation.

ICRW’s scan (2007) and the more recent (2011) systematic review of programmes tackling child marriage highlights that until recently there was only one evaluated child marriage programme across the whole West Africa region: Tostan’s Community Empowerment Program in Senegal. We believe that UNFPA has also evaluated a two year project entitled ‘Mettre fin au mariage précoce au Burkina’ although the report is not in the public domain. This finding emphasises the significant and continued dearth in evaluations of ‘what works’ and therefore of systematic and accessible learning and good practice.

One of the major challenges to implementing, monitoring and evaluating the impact of child marriage interventions is that it is about changing social norms in which attitude and behavioural change is intrinsic. This work takes time, often more than the timespan of a donor-funded project, and can be difficult to measure. The review points to the weak documentation of project approaches and strategies in the region and to the almost complete absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation in this regard.

This review of interventions focussed on regional initiatives with delaying or tackling child marriage as a specific objective. To date there are very few of these projects and programmes. Consequently we expanded the review to include initiatives with child marriage objectives nested within a broader project or programme and/or with unplanned outcomes related to child marriage. All the interventions can be grouped within six themes. These themes are not mutually exclusive.

vii. Child rights and protection
viii. Girls’ education and empowerment
ix. Sexual and reproductive health
x. Maternal and child health
xi. Community awareness raising and mobilisation
xii. Economic livelihoods including skills training.

Child rights and protection
Interventions in this area typically include improving legislative frameworks and awareness raising from national to local levels on child rights and protection. Common implementation strategies include policy advocacy and capacity development of education, health, justice, police services and child protection professionals.

Girls’ education and empowerment
A range of interventions focus on getting girls into school and lengthening their time in school. This focus theorises that ‘interventions that increase the opportunity cost of early marriage – such as increased access to secondary schooling or adolescent development programmes – can trigger a virtuous cycle of marriage postponement’ (Wahhaj 2014 in
ICRW 2014b). Drop-out prevention activities address multiple barriers to access and quality education, from costs (scholarships, uniforms, canteen & food programmes, free textbooks) to improving the quality and relevance of the education for girls (girls’ clubs, separate latrines, violence-free school programmes, curriculum reform, gender sensitive teaching and learning, etc) to parental and community awareness raising on the importance of girls’ education. Non-formal education, literacy and catch-up programmes also contribute to efforts to improve girls’ education and empowerment under this theme.

**Sexual and reproductive health**
Activities under this strand often include life skills education programmes for in or out of school children (more or less broadly understood from HIV prevention and support to cognitive and non-cognitive skills) and adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes focusing on sexual debut, contraception, STIs, HIV and related topics.

**Maternal and child health**
These programmes are usually provided for older adolescents and youth as well as adult women. They may are may not target married or unmarried women specifically. There is a tendency for married young girls, especially those under 18 and no longer in school, to be (deliberately or inadvertently) excluded. Run before, during and after pregnancy and child birth, activities cover the health of mother and child, including delivery, nutrition, breastfeeding and prevention of childhood diseases. When targeting adolescent girls health activities will specifically look at delivery related issues, prevention and response to obstetric fistula and care of the new born.

**Community awareness and mobilisation**
These programmes tend to be mainstreamed across the other interventions described here. Awareness raising activities can specifically address child marriage or more broadly girls’ education, girls’ rights and gender. Interventions may take the form of community meetings, shows (use of puppets, theatre, videos etc) or focused work led by and with community organisations and community leaders. Community development plans and similar tools represent a more advanced form of community mobilisation.

**Economic livelihoods including skills training**
Improving livelihoods, particularly of women, can be an accompanying measure to other projects (e.g. for income generating activities to contribute to children’s schooling) or projects in their own right linking women’s income generation to empowerment, increased decision making in the household and reduced vulnerabilities. In the past ten years there has been an increased focus on improving adolescent skills and economic livelihoods, partially addressing the causes and consequences of child marriage by providing girls with income generation and negotiation skills and authority to postpone marriage.

Much of the literature articulates the critical importance of interventions that focus on adolescent girls as a specific and critical target population for development initiatives, including in relation to child marriage. However, while there seems to be a lot of emphasis on working with girls and their families to delay the age at first marriage, there is much less emphasis on the potential husbands and their families. There may be an imbalance with ‘supply’ factors much more addressed than ‘demand’ factors.
4.2 Main actors

Child marriage has become a ‘hot topic’ in international development recently – arguably since the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child in October 2012 - and interest in adolescent girls and harmful traditional practices has surged with the 2014 Girl Summit and on the approach to the MDGs’ deadline year, 2015. In May 2014 the African Union launched a child marriage campaign in ten countries, including Burkina Faso and Niger, in partnership with UNFPA, Unicef and INGOs including Plan International. This campaign is due to run for two years and seeks to accelerate the end to child marriage through media events, advocacy and data collection. It would seem wise for efforts in these two West African countries to coalesce around any AU activities here or elsewhere in the region.

The Girls not Brides coalition is a strong voice in the region but is also in its infancy. It is due to define its regional priorities and strategy for engagement and expansion by the end of 2014. Preliminary intentions include strengthening advocacy work and engagement with civil society (personal communication, 2014).

The review identified a number of actors and potential partners working directly or indirectly on child marriage reduction. While larger programmes and flagship interventions of major players tend to be well known, there is little knowledge and no mapping of the work conducted by smaller national or local NGOs including community and faith-based organisations. Coordination and information sharing on child marriage programmes are constrained by the very set-up of the programmes, whether and where they fall under overarching sectors (education, child protection, health etc).

Table 7 maps the actors we have become acquainted with through this review as working directly or indirectly on child marriage in the four focus countries. We recommend that this list is populated, expanded and amended during Phase 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Countries of intervention</th>
<th>Type of intervention</th>
<th>Comparative advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UN agencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unicef</td>
<td>BF, G, M, N</td>
<td>Focused intervention in joint programming with UNFPA in BF; interventions spanning child protection &amp; education</td>
<td>Multi-sector approach; strong advocacy potential; access to Ministries and political instances; readiness to work with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>BF</td>
<td>Reduction programmes developing and comparing approaches to reduce child marriage; research</td>
<td>Robust research methodology and programme design; strong research and programming experience; political clout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Research on child marriage of West African girls to the diaspora</td>
<td>Transnational data; potential to map trans-border trends &amp; risk factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Associated research on child trafficking and forced labour</td>
<td>Connection with coerced labour of young brides and domestic abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multilateral / Bilateral agencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Union</td>
<td>BF, N</td>
<td>Two year campaign (2014-16) to eliminate child marriage through media, advocacy and data collection</td>
<td>Political leverage; Sub-Saharan Africa and West African regional learning and sharing; generation of good practices for advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td></td>
<td>Education themed, including cash transfers</td>
<td>Large scale; involving national ministries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-thematic but often education and gender, e.g. Safe Schools Program in Ghana</td>
<td>Medium to large scale; likely to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INGOs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Incisive research and advocacy lead</td>
<td>Human rights education for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Humanitarian – community-based in crisis ad insecurity</td>
<td>Works in unstable and conflict affects states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terre des Hommes</td>
<td>B, G, M, T</td>
<td>Human Rights advocacy, focused on the child &amp; child protection</td>
<td>Strong national networks; located in three of Plan’s child marriage focal countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Country Codes</td>
<td>Program/Activity</td>
<td>Collaboration Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tostan</td>
<td>G, M</td>
<td>Community Empowerment Programs, holistic approach</td>
<td>Community-driven; medium to long-term; compelling approach to social change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Vision</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Empirical research; legislative harmonisation and community activities</td>
<td>Operational in Kayes region – potential for collaboration. Too Young to Knot campaign proposal to AU with Girls not Brides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls not Brides</td>
<td>BF, G, M, N</td>
<td>Global partnership for awareness-raising, learning and coordination, and advocacy</td>
<td>Targeted mandate; works for local and national NGOs and with INGOs; advocacy potential &amp; link to AU campaign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National and Local NGOs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Country Codes</th>
<th>Program/Activity</th>
<th>Collaboration Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association des Femmes Juristes</td>
<td>B, N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association pour la Promotion de la Femme et la Protection de l’Enfant</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum for African Women Educationalists</td>
<td></td>
<td>Education-focused</td>
<td>Regional network with experience engaging girls and women, including through safe spaces and groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*B: Benin; BF: Burkina Faso; C: Cameroon; G: Guinea, M: Mali; N: Niger; T: Togo*
4.3 Plan child marriage programming

This section examines Plan’s experience of tackling child marriage in the region and each of the four focal countries, including any existing networks and partnerships. (For a brief overview of Plan operations in each country please see Annex C).

Plan WARO does not have a regional strategy for tackling child marriage. However, in March 2014 the regional office finalised a Concept Note: Developing a program model for WARO Flagship program on Child Marriage (Plan 2014). This Concept Note targets donors and outlines the rationale, objectives and resources needed for a sub-regional child marriage program. It cites an overall objective for a sub-regional program as to ‘contribute to decrease the incidence of child, early and forced marriage in West Africa’ (p.3). It explicitly aligns with the GGIP, aims to build on and develop research, and names some existing initiatives, project team and provisional budget.

The regional Child Protection framework implicitly provides coverage of child marriage as an issue within the goal of ‘stopping intergenerational poverty through the development of the potential of girls and young women to be better educated and for their children to have improved health and education outcomes’. There are four main pillars of the regional child protection framework:

i. Mapping and evaluation of child protection systems;
ii. Developing a model on community-based Child Protection system;
iii. Capacity development of CSOs to intervene on Child Protection;

Efforts at the national level to tackle child marriage are captured under the Child Protection theme in CSPs and, primarily, in practice.

Plan’s global expertise and experience in child and community-centred interventions, and especially on adolescent empowerment programming puts it in a strong position to develop a sustainable, innovative child marriage programme in the four focal countries, in each of which the programme should acknowledge and take account of existing work.

4.3.1 Burkina Faso

Plan has never conducted a project directly addressing child marriage. In the current CSP (2012-15) child marriage is located within the Child Protection theme under ‘contributing to a safe environment: fighting violence against children. Specifically, ‘support for the social rehabilitation of girls who are victims of early/unwanted marriages’. At community level, activities include:

- Identifying ‘victims’ of early marriage and facilitating their removal from marriage in Sanmatenga PU: “when we succeed we refer the girls to an association who deal with child protection. We collaborate with a centre run by Christian Sisters who take care of those children. The girls live there, learn some life skills – cooking, agribusiness, sewing - to help them become independent. We support this centre with funding” (Plan Burkina Faso, personal communication 2014);
- Close collaboration with local offices of the Ministry of Social Affairs to address the needs of married girls. In some provinces the local office has centres where the girls can stay and learn skills.
- Addressing the needs of children affected by child abuse through collaboration with the police and local offices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Health.
Plan facilitates community reports of child abuse by raising awareness of child abuse as a violation of children’s rights and encouraging community members to come forwards with information on specific cases. They publicise contact details for support services and Plan community workers. Once a case is raised, Plan talk to the child to do a rapid assessment of the situation and to identify potential response and support interventions;

- Awareness raising with children about early marriage and early pregnancy.

Plan’s recent mapping on Community-based Child Protection mechanisms revealed that in Burkina Faso, of the 6 regions in which Plan works, only one (Sanmatenga) had all Community-based Child Protection mechanisms addressing child marriage while none of the other five PUs were doing so (Global Child Protection Services 2014). In addition to associated initiatives within Child Protection, Plan addresses early pregnancy within its Child Survival and Development programme. There are no explicit links made with any child marriage-related initiatives.

Plan Burkina currently works with three relevant networks:

2. National coalition for children’s rights (Cobufad). In existence since 1995 and comprising 21 local & international NGOs;
3. FORCE, a coalition of seven INGOs initiated in 2011. It focuses on CRC monitoring and government accountability.

4.3.2 Guinea

Gender equality, inclusion and conflict prevention/peace building are integrated into Plan Guinea’s programming. The current CSP (2013-17) notes that ‘Traditional attitudes and behaviours in communities that plays against the schooling of girls considered as “investment for someone else’s family” (i.e. girls are considered as belonging to their future husband's family)’ are a root cause of educational disparities (CSP, p.14). Despite the CSP raising issues strongly associated with child marriage, there is only one explicit reference to child marriage within the description of activities under Child Participation and Protection: ‘conduct IEC campaigns and promote behavioural change at community level, for the abandonment of traditional practices that are harmful or discriminatory (e.g. FGM, Early/forced marriages, and domestic violence against children, boys and girls). This will be done in cooperation with competent organizations specializing in those areas’ (CSP, p.22).

Plan Guinea describes their approach to child marriage as 'integrated' and as such there are no targeted child marriage projects. Instead, each programme is supposed to contain a child marriage theme, for example an FGM project running since 2007 includes child marriage awareness raising activities, campaigns and child rights information sessions in which child marriage is explained. Child rights is the umbrella term under which Plan Guinea may or may not raise child marriage as a rights violation – whether and when the issue is raised depends on the local partner.

When Plan and its partners discuss child marriage within communities, intergenerational dialogue is encouraged and facilitated. Facilitators encourage mothers to talk to their unmarried daughters about marriage, pregnancy and sexual and reproductive health issues.

Plan’s recent mapping of Community-based Child Protection mechanisms revealed that in Guinea, of the four regions Plan in which Plan works, only one (Macenta) had all child
protection community-based mechanisms addressing child marriage while in two PUs none of them were doing so, and information was not available for the remaining area (Global Child Protection Services, 2014).

Beyond Child Participation and Protection, the Education portfolio’s projects for out-of-school children include developing self-esteem, disseminating information on child rights, and FGM modules. Plan Guinea believe there are good practices from FGM initiatives, including within Education programming, that could be transferred to child marriage projects, specifically: (i) individual capacity building / training; (ii) peer education; (iii) retaining girls at school through scholarships and exam support.

Plan Guinea has three main existing and relevant partnerships:
1. An MOU with Terre des Hommes;
2. ActionAid Guinea for keeping girls in school;

4.3.3 Mali

Unlike other countries, child marriage is addressed by specific interventions in Mali. Again, it falls under Child Protection alongside FGM and it is mainstreamed through advocacy for girls’ and children’s rights. Plan Mali’s current CSP (2012-2016) defines two activities directly related to child marriage: (i) advocacy at national level to increase the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18; (ii) to reduce early marriage rate by 2% from baseline in three PUs. Gender inequality is a cross-cutting theme.

Plan’s recent mapping of Community-based Child Protection mechanisms revealed that in Mali, out of 7 regions Plan in which Plan works, three (Barouéli, Kati and Timbouktou) had all child protection community-based mechanisms addressing child marriage while four areas were not doing so (Global Child Protection Services, 2014).

With Japanese funding, Plan is implementing a child marriage project in 26 villages. The project includes a baseline study to address the knowledge gap surrounding child marriage in these communities and the establishment of watchdog committees in charge of acting upon reports of cases of child marriage. Awareness raising activities will take place with me, women, boys and girls on early marriage and how it negatively affect not only brides and grooms but also their families and communities. In addition the project will conduct targeted advocacy activities with religious leaders of all faith and local decision makers. Monthly support sessions will take place for married girls with a focus on reproductive health. General advocacy on girls’ education, young people’s reproductive health and income generation activities will be included during implementation to link early marriage reduction to other activities conducted by Plan and their local partners.

At national level Plan has concentrated its efforts on partnership working and joint advocacy and lobbying towards the development of adequate legislation on FGM and child marriage. Although a new law was passed on child marriage, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 16 with parental consent (18 without parental consent). There is still scope, therefore, for national level advocacy.

Many of Plan Mali’s current initiatives on child marriage are strongly and explicitly connected to its longer history of work to eliminate FGM. Plan’s main and relevant partners for the development of child marriage programming are:
1. Coalition Malienne des droits de l’enfant (National Coalition for Child Rights) comprising 77 organisations including Plan;
2. Equipe de recherche et d’appui au développement (ERAD) with whom Plan have an MOU;
3. Ministry of Women, Children and Families – a key partner on efforts to tackle FGM.

### 4.3.4 Niger

Plan Niger’s original 2009-14 CSP does not explicitly mention child marriage and it is unclear in which programme it is addressed although it seems to sit under Child Protection. The CSP lacked a rights-based approach and CP3 contains only few girl-focused objectives, with no or very limited links to adolescence in general, sexual and reproductive health or education programmes. However, an updated 2012 CSP has amended these weaknesses and has a focus on child marriage, which is believed to have contributed to early marriage reduction interventions in Tillabéri and Dosso PUs. In Tillabéri, Plan wants to reduce the prevalence of child marriage by 5%, from 42% to 37%.

In Dosso, Plan strengthened its community-based child protection mechanisms to address child marriage although not all are currently addressing child marriage systematically. This strengthening is complemented by a Plan UK project to reduce early marriage. The overall approach is to focus on prevention rather than response. Community awareness raising for male and female leaders, religious leaders, youth in or out-of-school, school Parliaments will be conducted. Cases can be referred to community-based child protection mechanisms developed and supported by Plan and subsequently escalated to Ministry officials and judges for minors. The aim is that families will abandon the marriage process before the girl reaches 18. School-based advocacy and girls’ economic empowerment complement key activities.

In Tillabéri programme activities are limited to awareness raising and work with judges for minors but all community-based child protection mechanisms are addressing child marriage (Plan Global Child Protection Services, 2014).

Plan Niger believes that education is a strong protective factor from early marriage and a route to girls’ empowerment while recognising that many parents do not uphold empowerment as a virtue. Plan aims to continue to address early marriage through the promotion of education for girls on the basis that “without education we touch the leaves of tree, without the roots” (Plan Niger personal communication 2014).

Plan is working with several relevant national and local NGOs:
1. Association des Femmes Juristes du Niger, linked to work in Dosso;
2. l’Association pour la Promotion de la Femme et la Protection de l’Enfant (APFPE), linked to work in Dosso;
3. SOS Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violences Familiales
4. Ecole Parrainage et Actions de Développement (EPAD)
5. Association Nigérienne pour le Traitement de la Délinquance et la Prévention du Crime (ANTD)
4.4 Promising practices

The review has, with difficulty, elicited six practices on child marriage in the region that we believe should be of interest in Plan’s consideration of further research and the development of a sub-regional child marriage programme. These are not necessarily ‘promising’ or ‘best’ practices as none of them have been evaluated and there is very little associated and publicly available documentation. We strongly recommend that Phase 2 allocates the resources and remit to investigate national best practices more rigorously.

These examples are provided to shine a spotlight on some emerging innovations and pilot projects that aim to understand more about child marriage in specific locations and tackle the issue holistically as part of facilitating broader change in adolescent girls’ lives. They are presented to follow the order of thematic interventions highlighted in section 4.1.

4.4.1 Community referral and reporting mechanism

Several NGOs, including World Vision and Plan Mali and Niger, have focused on strengthening community level child protection and referral mechanisms as a tool to address child marriage. Details of Plan’s activities can be found in the country sections.

**Box 1: Early Warning Committees in Senegal**
World Vision Senegal established child protection early warning committees at the zonal, village and school levels in the region of Kolda under the framework of the Vélingara Child Protection Project.

The school level committees built on an on-going child protection initiative delivered by Unicef. Abused children were identified and referred upwards when the situation could not be solved locally. Child marriage was one of the potential reasons for action and referral although the project only covered primary schools, which limited the potential identification of child marriage cases among out-of-school and lower secondary school girls.

4.4.2 Intergenerational education

**Box 2: Mères-éducatrices in Burkina Faso**
From 2008 to 2010 the Population Council implemented an innovative project in Burkina Faso commissioned by UNFPA, Unicef and the Ministry of Social Affairs to reduce child marriage and to empower and inform adolescent girls on sexual and reproductive health issues (Engebretsen & Kabore 2011). The project combined a range of strategies including work done by “Mères-éducatrices” (mother-educators) on information dissemination on reproductive and sexual health and pregnancy, scholarships for adolescent girls not married and still in school, micro-credit for young wives for income generation and awareness raising activities with elders, religious leaders and other community members.

The ‘mères-éducatrices’ activity covered 25 villages across five regions. The mères-éducatrices were young women aged 19-24, educated to at least the end of primary school and married with at least one child. The rationale behind this setting was to involve adolescent girls and young women who had already experienced marriage to inform younger unmarried girls and their parents about the negative effects of early marriage.

The married young women received literacy classes and training on life skills and reproductive health. They were trained to share this information, using a manual, with
unmarried girls and their parents. The mères-éducatrices each have a bicycle given to them by the project to travel between the villages, visiting households and holding meetings. They met unmarried girls in small groups every week to discuss the topics raised in the manuals. Community leaders were also trained to support and lead discussions with parents and families.

Results indicated adolescent girls gained knowledge on key health issues including obstetric fistula and early pregnancy and increased their use of sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for delivery assistance.


4.4.3 Public declarations to abandon harmful traditional practices

Box 3: Public declarations to end child marriage
In January 2014, 74 communities in the Labe region of Mid-Guinea committed to abandon FGC and child marriage. Eighteen of the communities had completed Tostan’s Community Empowerment Program (CEP), which equips participants with knowledge and skills in health, education, governance, the environment and livelihoods. The CEP is a three-year program delivered in local languages that takes a holistic approach to problem-solving and imparts knowledge and skills to enable communities to reach their own conclusions about the protection of human rights. The Program is structured and carefully sequenced with a Facilitators Guide and fundamental principles including listening, dialogue and discussion. Modules iteratively reinforce previous learning about human dignity and responsibility. It is an approach to social norm change that acknowledges deep systemic reasons for behaviours. Tostan works towards economic growth to overcome harmful traditional practices like child marriage.

One decision made by community members in Labe was to reinforce child protection in the region. Through a process of ‘organised diffusion’ community members share information and ideas to others in their social network, which reinforces and extends the reach of decisions. In Labe, this lead to 56 ‘adopted’ communities choosing to abandon FGC, child and forced marriage.

The communities worked all together to organise a declaration ceremony, where they were joined by religious leaders, government officials and health workers. At the ceremony, a prominent Imam gave a speech on the dissociation of harmful practices and Islam. Tostan believes that leaders standing up and speaking out in public, at a forum in which they can be held accountable for their rhetoric, is crucial to encouraging a critical mass of supporters. After the ceremonies, Community Management Committees supervise and verify the agreement after the ceremony, taking collaborative follow-up actions if required.

(Adapted from personal communication with Tostan Executive Director, Molly Melching, and http://www.tostan.org/news/74-communities-guinea-abandon-female-genital-cutting-and-childforced-marriage)
4.4.4 Information dissemination and awareness raising

Programming recommendations in the grey literature include awareness raising and information dissemination to communities, particularly parents, religious and community leaders. However, there is little detailed information or best practice on the process, content and outcomes of this activity. Examples of information dissemination strategies gathered for this review are offered in Box 4.

**Box 4: Information dissemination approaches**
- Community meetings (general discussions, or theatre/puppets shows)
- Community development plans and planning meetings
- Information leaflets for parents, communities and traditional/religious leaders based on legislation and religion (e.g. Association des Femmes Juristes du Niger)
- Dialogue and nonformal training with religious leaders and chiefs
- Youth awareness raising meetings (for both in and out-of-school children)
- School-based awareness raising meetings (Child Parliaments and school staff)
- Radio programmes (e.g. Unicef, Kayes region, Mali)
- Youth media/young reporters (e.g. Plan)
- Engaging girls as ambassadors for advocacy and campaigns (Plan Cameroon)

4.4.5 Youth economic empowerment

**Box 5: Youth Savings and Loans Associations in Benin and Togo**
Plan Benin and Togo have piloted youth economic empowerment projects, funded by Plan Netherlands National Office within Plan WARO’s Violence Against Children Program, to tackle the endemic poverty that forces families to marry their daughters early (Plan, 2013). Youth Savings and Loans Associations are established comprising out-of-school children and youth who are vulnerable to violence, particularly trafficking, child labour and child marriage. The focus of the Associations is to increase young people’s independence and reduce their vulnerability to violence. Plan provides credit facilities to enable young people to start small businesses such as hairdressing or market trading. Building their economic capacity means that they can stand stronger, say no to marriage and support their families. 800 girls have been trained on gender, life skills, leadership and communication skills.

The project has been instrumental in enhancing girls’ leadership skills. Members of girls’ groups, including girls who have been subjected to early marriages, use social media and radio programmes to give their testimonies on child marriage and talk about its effects on their lives – their education, health and dignity.

*(Personal communication 2014: Nathalia Ngende, Plan Regional Manager Violence Against Children project)*

4.4.6 Building evidence through research and evaluation

In response to the information gap on early marriage and interventions that work in the region, donors and agencies have worked in recent years on building up the evidence base in the field.
Box 6: Building evidence on strategies to delay marriage and support married girls

In 2013 the Population Council, in partnership with Unicef, UNFPA and the Ministry of Social Action, launched a three-year child marriage reduction follow-up project in northern Burkina to assess the relative effectiveness of the four interventions to reduce child marriage that were implemented during the 2008-2010 project. The project, characterised by a very strong research component is located in Leraba province, Cascades region, in the far south west of the country. It builds on the Council’s prior experience and results, including the Berhane Hewan programme in Ethiopia (Population Council, 2014).

The project operates in four intervention sites plus a control site (no intervention), each of which is targeted with a different intervention: (1) community awareness sessions; (2) educational support to adolescent girls aged 12-16; (3) conditional cash transfers for families whose daughters remain unmarried for the duration of the project. The fourth site receives a combination of all three models.

Prior to project inception, the team undertook an assessment, listing all the households in the sites and registering unmarried girls aged 12-16 and families who were willing to participate. Only unmarried adolescent girls were eligible to join the study. Parents register their girls publicly in the presence of local leaders and consent to keeping their daughter unmarried and in school for the duration of the project. The public registration is intended to increase accountability. Each girl’s details and monitoring information is maintained in a database. The team completes a survey, with questions covering marriage, sexual and reproductive health and education, with each girl every six months. Survey data is triangulated with school registers, teachers and community leaders.

All kinds of union – civil, custom and religious, are classified as ‘marriage’. 80% school attendance is required for girls, especially in sites 2 and 3. The Council has developed monitoring tools which are used by the provincial branch of the Ministry and the implementing NGO partner. Costs will be captured throughout the project for each intervention in order that the Council will be able to provide unit costs for each type of intervention to measure efficiency and to support organisations who wish to replicate a component in the future. Initial registration was over 88%, indicating the willingness of families to participate. The final results are due to be published in 2016.

In addition, in Burkina Faso (as well as Ghana, Uganda and Malawi), a National Survey on Adolescents collected household data on 12-19 year olds in 2004. The Survey was part of a research project, designed by the Guttmacher Institute, to understand adolescent transitions and specifically HIV risk among youth. Several academic publications draw on the datasets to ascertain risk factors for early marriage among Burkinabe girls (Biddlecom et al. 2008; Chae 2013), which are useful because they contain data for an age group younger than the DHS.
4.5 Rapid assessment of practices

4.5.1 Lack of robust monitoring, evaluation and research

None of the practices and projects referenced in this review, whether implemented by Plan or others, have gathered baseline and endline data or been evaluated during and at the end of the project, rigorously and robustly with child marriage indicators and outcomes assessed. Data that could provide information on what works to address child marriage is therefore almost entirely absent. By consequence, we also have no information on practices that do not work, hence projects continuing to be developed with strategies that might have proven useful in some settings (e.g. South Asia or East Africa) or some sectors but are less effective transferred to others. Certainly the literature and country review strongly indicates that there is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution to ending child marriage.

The development of indicators for measurement, adequately resourced monitoring and evaluation stems and protocols, and further research is urgently needed. There is a huge opportunity for organisations to make a sustained and marked contribution to fill this gap, particularly an organisation like Plan.

It is important to note that, while DHS data provides a periodic account of the marital status of women by country, it is not without its gaps and errors. The purpose of the DHS remains to monitor and develop reproductive health, for which marriage is a status marker. DHS is not interested in child marriage per se, as a human rights violation. Such analysis must be drawn on and learned from with caution, and in conjunction with other research methodologies and iterative lessons learned from practice.

Specific examples include: the UNFPA/Population Council/Unicef project in Burkina Faso where an evidence base for effective child marriage interventions is sought and where target communities will be receiving different interventions to try to ascertain the pros and cons of each, their cost effectiveness, and potential for scale up.

4.5.2 Data gaps and missed opportunities within Plan

Section 3 shows how little information is accessible on child marriage in specific countries and at the sub-national level. There are also information gaps within organisations, including Plan. Plan CSPs recognise child marriage as a rights violation and form of violence against children (girls in particular), but Plan currently has little useful data on and around child marriage that would enable country offices to identify target groups and design tailored activities.

The review revealed that Plan has missed opportunities when conducting data collection exercises, such as baseline surveys, to gather data on child marriage and related issues. In Guinea, for example, a recent child protection and health baseline survey in five sites (Barry et al. 2012) failed to include any questions to elicit respondents’ marital status, marital history, age at first marriage or any related characteristics.

Another concern is the lack of analysis of available information in some of Plan’s commissioned research and surveys. Information on socio-economic characteristics of respondents is always collected, but none of the respondents to whom we spoke or documentation reviewed showed any analysis applied to the datasets to extract information on marital and sexual history. Failure to triangulate early marriage histories with socio-
demographic characteristics, such as ethnic group, educational history, or inter-generational trends (i.e. if grandmother/mother married young, daughter marries young) contributes to the overall lack of deep understanding of child marriage issues in the region.

The literature review reveals that schooling can be protective against child marriage and/or increase the risk of early pregnancy. Plan and other organisations such as Unicef promote girls’ education as a right and, especially more recently, as a route to empowerment away from early marriage. The complexity of the school factor in child marriage requires that mitigation measures are taken when promoting girls’ education in areas with high rates of early sex and early marriage; measures that tackle violence against girls and women, safety in and around schools, reproductive health and negotiation of safe sex.

4.5.3 Mainstreaming versus targeted approach

Many NGOs, including Plan’s current approach, address child marriage as a cross-sectoral issue, centred in child protection work and mainstreamed across adolescent health, education and livelihoods. Even when child marriage falls under a specific sector, such as child protection, activities are not necessarily targeting specifically child marriage but rather a whole range of child rights’ violations and abuse.

For Plan the community-based Child Protection mechanism is a critical avenue for child marriage issues (e.g. Niger). World Vision has adopted a similar approach. The rationale for mainstreaming child marriage under child protection is clear: recognising child marriage as a violence against children, protecting children from it, using existing community structures to address the issue with a strong sustainability potential, finding local solutions for a diversity of situations, coordinating cross-sectoral response across health, police, justice and education actors.

A few staff in Plan have expressed the need however for a greater focus on child marriage in child protection documentation and training in order for all to understand its specificity, complexity and be exposed to concrete and practical ways to address the issue at community and national levels. This would also give child marriage a greater recognition across the organisation.

4.5.4 Community-based approach

A common feature of most of the practices outlined in the previous section is their community-based approach. NGOs with longstanding presence in communities have developed a range of approaches to address sensitive issues around children, gender, violence, sex and taboos. It is based on this knowledge that many have over the years identified allies and champions locally who are able to get communities to talk about such topics. If the agents of change approach works for a sensitive topic it is reasonable to assume that it will be working for another. Community-based approaches have given increasing recognition to the role of women leaders and youth. For Plan, having both men and women and boys and girls involved in activities is also critical.

4.5.5 National advocacy

While most activities are well articulated at community or local level, the national advocacy strategies that sustain them are more opaque. This is true not only for Plan but also other partners, hence the relative few national coalitions focusing on child marriage and the very
recent emergence of regional campaigns such that recently launched by the African Union. The review was not able to clearly identify national level advocacy messages disseminated by one or more partners at national level or specific entry points for those.

4.5.6 Partnerships

Child marriage partnership practices across the region fall under a few categories: (i) national coalition for child rights broadly, (ii) partnership with UN organisations spanning different mandates (UNFPA and Unicef mostly), (iii) partnerships with national or local implementing NGOs, mostly child rights organisations; partnerships with national and decentralised authorities (health, judiciary, education, social affairs); partnerships with NGOs/entities with specific expertise such as Associations of Women Jurists.

There was little evidence of partnerships with WHO, universities, religious associations at national level and non-traditional partners for child marriage reduction, such as the private sector, police officer unions or other professional bodies in the relevant sectors. Overall for most organisations we can identify dependence on a few strategic NGO partners, which reveals a significant potential to enhance these partnerships both strategically and practically.

4.6 Leveraging Plan’s technical expertise

Across international and regional levels, Plan has a great deal of expertise to leverage for a WARO sub-regional child marriage programme. There is also significant drive to realise a successful programme among the four focus countries. This is promising.

However, the findings of this review indicate strongly that Plan WARO should:

- Harness the appropriate and most efficient resources and skills in this effort;
- Decide and better articulate its understanding of child marriage at the regional level, potentially with an accompanying Theory of Change, and building on the 2014 Concept Note;
- Think critically and allocate time to pursuing further research (Phase 2);
- Consider a pilot phase from which to learn lessons on monitoring, evaluation and implementation.

In terms of building blocks, the following personnel and resources are critical:

1. Gender technical specialists
2. Adolescent empowerment technical specialists
3. Regional Child Protection network and personnel
4. BIAAG resources (human and material)
5. Global position paper on Child Marriage
6. Regional Concept Note on Child Marriage
5. Proposal for Phase 2 research

This section proposes research themes and methods for a Phase 2 field research in the four focal countries. We understand that this research will be designed and conducted within the next six months. This proposal is designed to address two key issues highlighted by the review: (i) knowledge gaps on child marriage at the national and sub-national levels; (ii) lack of promising practices.

The research themes and question areas given in 5.1 below reflect and develop the Sphere of Influence diagram (Section 2.5), in which we proposed multiple influencers and influences on girls’ early marriage at five different levels: (i) Girls; (ii) Family; (iii) Community; (iv) Legislation, policies and systems; (v) Socio-political ideology. We present our proposal for future research under these five levels of influence.

The indicative research question areas are not ordered. They are also not interview/FGD questions but are prompts for question areas. Specific research questions will need to be developed and adapted for each country according to existing research and Plan’s familiarity with the context. Where there has been little research and little evidence of positive change (e.g. Niger) this must be taken into account in research. Where more data is available and projects ongoing, such as in Burkina Faso, questioning should include a strong programming focus to avoid overlap and maximise synergies at both local and national levels.

In Section 5.2 we recommend a range of methods that may suit the research theme and question areas. While interviews and focus group discussions are popular and fruitful methods, many communities may have FGD fatigue and creative, participatory methods often yield much more insightful results. Plan should build on its own national experience and best practice when choosing methods to apply in PUs. It is good practice to use a combination of methods in order to explore different themes or to look at one issue from different perspectives. Different methods will suit differently research areas and questions.

Complementary to specific research questions and general methodological advice, we offer three overarching recommendations to Plan WARO as it embarks on the design of Phase 2 research:

1. Focus on collecting high quality qualitative data to complement existing and recent quantitative evidence from the DHS. This qualitative data would fill gaps in understanding and explaining localised processes and specificities of child marriage at PU level;

2. Consider developing long-term formal partnership(s) with accredited university or academic institution(s) based either in the region with regional reach and expertise, or in each of the focal countries for national research support and gravitas. Plan WARO could consider identifying M&E partnerships at regional and/or country level, perhaps with the same institution if technical expertise and capacity is sufficient. This will support research rigour, ethics and expand the expertise-base to support future programming;

3. Maximise the potential and complementarity of Phase 2 by full and timely engagement with other research ongoing in the region including: (i) ICRW’s research for Unicef in Senegal (Sept-Oct 2014); (ii) World Vision’s Mali research (Sept 2014 onwards); (iii) IOM’s diaspora research with Tostan.
## 5.1 Research Themes and Question Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Question Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics of married girls &amp; girls ‘at risk’ of marriage</td>
<td>Socio-demographic characteristics: current age, relationships in household of residence (head of household; siblings; biological/extended family; marital family)&lt;br&gt;Event histories: Age at menarche; age at first marriage &amp; experience of marital process; age at sexual debut; ever pregnant / age at first birth&lt;br&gt;Time use: proportion of time spent on different activities including schooling, domestic tasks, paid work, etc.&lt;br&gt;Schooling: highest grade; age, grade &amp; reasons for drop-out; reasons for staying in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency and aspirations</td>
<td>Agency: did married girls know their partners before marriage; who arranged the marriage; girls’ role in process; other influencers; experiences of harassment or coercion in event histories; age of spouse.&lt;br&gt;Aspirations for relationships, marriage, family, schooling and work&lt;br&gt;Mechanisms used by girls to resist or protect themselves from early marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, behaviour &amp; skills</td>
<td>Knowledge &amp; livelihood skills: STDs; HIV/AIDS; child rights; practical skills; non-cognitive skills around personal development, goal setting and assertiveness. Learned at home, school, elsewhere&lt;br&gt;Attitudes of unmarried girls to girls married &lt;18&lt;br&gt;Married girls in school: performance in class; participation in clubs/activities; attitude of teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Participation in peer and other networks in the community&lt;br&gt;Regular activities outside the school and the home</td>
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<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Power, decision-making &amp; marital process</td>
<td>Main decision-makers on child betrothal &amp; marriage; role of mothers, elder women, extended family&lt;br&gt;Is early marriage common within families – intergenerational and sibling trends; sons marry child brides&lt;br&gt;What factors delay marriage; what factors drive marriage (menarche, location, livelihood, education, wealth)&lt;br&gt;What bride price is exchanged; who leads this transaction&lt;br&gt;Duration of marital process; accompanying rites/rituals associated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wealth &amp; employment</td>
<td>Employment status &amp; type of head of household; perceptions of wealth&lt;br&gt;Effect of positive &amp; negative economic change on timing and process of marriages (e.g. crisis; cash transfers (incentives); income generation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>Are any girls in the community married/betrothed to migrants or foreign nationals; who, why</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Power &amp; peer relations</strong></td>
<td>Role of the wider community in child marriages: who, what, when</td>
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<td>Perceptions of relative ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ drivers</td>
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<td>Socio-economic characteristics of husbands of child brides</td>
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<td>Husband/young men’s perceptions of agency &amp; power in marital process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional practices</strong></td>
<td>Prevalence of other coercive gendered practices: forced marriage; FGC; other</td>
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<td>Community members’ expressions of gender and men &amp; women’s roles and relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>School policy on married girls &amp; young mothers – permission to remain in school / transfer / expulsion</td>
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<td>Formal or informal teaching and learning on child marriage in the classroom or in clubs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collection and retention of information on reasons for drop out</td>
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<td>School strategies to bring children back to school; school strategies to prevent drop out/child marriage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ attitudes to child marriage</td>
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<td>Parents’ of married girls attitudes to schooling; husband families’ attitudes towards married girls’ schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health services</strong></td>
<td>Health service interventions on child marriage: what, when (prevention – response – compensation)</td>
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<td>Health service interventions for adolescents: what; inclusion of married adolescents; targeted programs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Crisis &amp; instability</strong></td>
<td>Effect of environmental/socio-economic/political/religious crises on the community; on child marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious practice &amp; family law</strong></td>
<td>Religious beliefs and practices explicitly associated with child marriage in the community</td>
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<td>Position/attitudes of local religious leaders on child marriage; role in marriage ceremonies in last 5 years</td>
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<td>Prevalence of customary marriages in the community; of polygamous marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Legislation, policies and systems</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Child &amp; social protection</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge of girls, boys; families, community members of national law &amp; policy on child marriage (e.g. minimum ages); sources of information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law enforcement mechanisms and sanctions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Responses to child marriage incidence: who, what, when (prevention – response – compensation)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role of child protection mechanisms at national and local levels on child marriage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Successful examples of community-level child protection mechanisms to prevent child marriage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sensitisation of public sector staff (social workers, health workers, police, judges) to child marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Media &amp; advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Main source of popular information for girls, boys and community members (radio, SMS, film, TV, internet etc)</td>
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<td>Well known national champions speaking up against child marriage</td>
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<td>Education &amp; health</td>
<td>Role and responsibility of Ministry of Education on child rights in general and gender equality including national curriculum &amp; textbooks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role and responsibility of Ministry of Health on child rights in general, adolescent girls &amp; women’s health</td>
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<td>Training modules for teachers and health workers</td>
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<td>Socio-political ideology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
<td>Definition of gender or gender equality in government publications/policies</td>
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<td>Provisions for gender equality / against discrimination in government legislation or policies (e.g. domestic violence; access to education)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political will</td>
<td>Leadership: speakers against child marriage in last 5 years: Ministry; position; champion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commitment: actions taken; laws passed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Responsiveness: engagement of government with civil society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Societal norms, economy and religion</td>
<td>National religious leaders public stance on child marriage; influence of religious bodies at national level</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Integration of the issue in national debate: media, parliamentary debate, civil society action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>Position of civil society organisations on child marriage: influence level, potentiality, gaps and challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media &amp; technology</td>
<td>Media reporting on cases: where, how, contribution to national debate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main media at community level and role as influencer of traditional practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other forms of technology (e.g. internet) at community level: potentiality and challenges</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Research Questions in French must be clear on the difference between bride price and dowry*
5.2 Research Methods

To respond the range of research themes and question areas proposed, research participants are likely to be needed from several different groups and methods will need to be tailored to the participants and research theme. Table 9 below suggests a list of participant groups and methods for engagement. Methods or a combination of methods can be used as part of an interview or a focus group discussion.

Table 9: Suggested research respondents and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant group</th>
<th>Suggested methods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married adolescent girls (age 11-18)</td>
<td>• Time Use Surveys</td>
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<td>• Video diaries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Life lines*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Body maps**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Outcomes star***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unmarried adolescent girls (age 11-18)</td>
<td>• Time Use Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Video diaries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Outcomes star</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ranking activities****</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stakeholder mapping*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent boys (age 11-18)</td>
<td>• Time Use Surveys</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Video diaries</td>
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<td>• Outcomes star</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ranking activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stakeholder mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult women (age 19 +), including mothers of married girls</td>
<td>• Focus Group Discussions (FGD)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal testimonies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ranking activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stakeholder mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult men (age 19 +), including fathers and husbands of married girls</td>
<td>• Focus Group Discussions (FGD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ranking activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Stakeholder mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public sector workers (teachers, health workers, police, lawyers)</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and civil society representatives</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
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</table>

* Life lines are used for adolescents to present and reflect on their lives. Using a rope or a line on the ground (or on a sheet of paper) representing their life, adolescents place flowers and stones to highlight important positive or negative events. Adolescents present their life line explaining the meaning of each flower and stone. The written summary of the lifeline of the respondent must be validated by the adolescent.

** Body maps can be used to explore and record respondents’ views on how early marriage has affected their lives. Combine flipcharts together and draw a body (outline the contours
of a respondent if culturally appropriate). Ask key questions for each body part and record respondents’ answers. E.g. **Head**: How has marriage affected what you think/your mind? **Ears**: What have you heard as a result of being married? How has being married affected the way people listen to you? **Arms**: As a result of your marriage, what activities are you more and less involved in? **Feet**: As a result of your marriage, are there places where you can or cannot go? Etc...

***Outcomes stars*** are self-assessment tools. Each star branch represents an indicator. Respondents assess where they stand on each indicator on a scale 1 to 10 or 1 to 5. In the context of Phase 2, Outcomes stars could be used to assess the level of agency, sense of self, goal orientation, self-esteem, school success and other attitudes and behaviours relevant to the research. Outcomes stars could then be compared across respondent groups to identify trends and patterns.

****Ranking** activities can be used for prioritising early marriage factors. A breadth of ranking activities are available such as diamond ranking, dart board, ranking charts, etc. Drawings can be used to replace written statements.

*****Stakeholder mapping*** can be used to identify the persons involved in early marriage negotiations. Use drawing, particularly with young people. Clarify which stakeholders are represented on the flip chart and ask participants to discuss their role and power during the negotiation process. Stones (or stars/ticks/post its if working with paper) can be used by participants to identify those stakeholders with the most power: give 3 to 5 stones to each participant asking them to allocate them to the stakeholders that have the most power in the marriage negotiation. More than one stone can be used for a single stakeholder. Stones are counted to identify the most powerful/influential stakeholders. A follow-up discussion will allow participants to comment on this ranking.

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5.3 Additional issues for Phase 2 to support Plan’s programming process

There is scope in Phase 2 to organise activities that would enable Plan to better programme for child marriage reduction in each country. While broad areas of expertise that Plan could leverage have been identified in Section 4.6, interviews with key informants did not enable an in-depth investigation of the environment within which Plan operates at national level. Phase 2 provides an opportunity to better understand this environment and how it may positively and negatively influence Plan’s interventions.

In light of the above, we propose that multi-stakeholder workshops are organised during Phase 2 in order to:

i. Map in full the actors involved with child marriage at national and local levels with a focus on institutional (across sectors) and civil society actors as well as services and non-traditional actors (for example the media, celebrities, universities, private sector);

ii. Identify who works on prevention, response or mitigation and how programmes are designed and monitored;
iii. Conduct a SWOT analysis to qualify Plan’s national level expertise and potentiality in terms of activity implementation, monitoring and evaluation, research and advocacy;

iv. Ensure that CSO representation covers both child and women’s rights streams, which have overlapping and complementary mandates on child marriage. The cross-fertilization of experiences of reducing other harmful traditional practices (e.g. FGC) and of efforts to eliminate violence against women should be fruitful;

v. Learn lessons from behavioural change programmes, particularly those run in sensitive contexts, including FGC, HIV/AIDS and GBV prevention programmes. These lessons should be contextualised to each country and PU to avoid replicating universal ‘remedies’ that may miss subtle but crucial differences between communities;

vi. Assess risk by considering the potential positive and harmful effects of chosen interventions/activities and how to mitigate those at the level of the child, family, community and the country;

vii. Reflect on the overall approach to programming and whether or when child marriage reduction programmes/activities will be more relevant as standalone activities to emphasise the pressing need of addressing the issue or as mainstreamed activities as part of broader interventions such as child protection and education. Pros and cons of each approach should be sought and how to combine them to maximise impact.

viii. Develop national Theory of Change documents for child marriage that reflects the context, specificities and capacities of each country.
6. Recommendations

6.1 Understanding the sub-regional complexity and variability of child marriage
The drivers and processes associated with child marriage vary across families, communities and countries.

We strongly recommended that Plan pursues its efforts to understand the local meanings, practices and processes of child marriage, including through well-planned Phase 2 research, in order that its sub-regional programme fully reflects a strong and thoughtful information base.

6.2 Situation analysis
Child marriage is unevenly covered across Plan CSPs and PU action plans. It is recommended that Plan WARO and country offices systematically review future CSPs and action plans and include child marriage into all future situation analyses processes leading to the development of national and PU programmes and strategies.

The review identified opportunities missed by Plan COs to collect data on child marriage at community level when undertaking household and other surveys. When data is collected, it is rarely triangulated to its full potential. Socio-demographic characteristics are rarely used to learn more about the characteristics of respondents (girls or households) that have experienced child marriage.

We strongly recommend that Plan COs maximise data collection opportunities by systematically reviewing research plans with a view to inserting questions on child marriage and ensuring that this data is collected sensitively, analysed fully and utilised in future programming.

6.3 Theory of change
The four focus countries present challenging environments in which to address child marriage – this is especially the case in Niger. Plan must recognise this challenging context to ensure that programme goals are ambitious and achievable.

We recommend that Plan Country Offices, with support from the Regional Office, develop tailored Theory of Change documents to share understanding internally of how to achieve positive change for girls against child marriage.

6.4 Target beneficiaries
The drivers of child marriage are complex and there are no quick wins to eliminate the practice. Responses need to be sensitive to current drivers and understand why parents, men and even girls themselves might take these decisions. All girls that are at risk of child marriage and girls that are currently or formerly married are potential beneficiaries.

The literature focuses very little on the socio-demographic characteristics of men engaging with the practice of child marriage either as fathers or grooms/husbands. There is minimal documented practice on engaging men and their families. Most literature and projects so far address girls’ and their natal family. Engaging with men as potential husbands and their families is particularly critical so that programmes address the ‘demand’ for child marriage as well as the supply. This importantly recognises that it is not only girls’ families who are responsible. Specific work with fathers would also be useful in order to devise strategies for change that address their dominant role as patriarchs, negotiators and recipients of the
bride price. Identifying male champions for child marriage reduction and mitigation in communities and supporting them play a mediator role in cases could also be a considered.

We recommend that a sub-national programme addresses the rights of both unmarried ‘at risk’ girls and currently or formerly married adolescent girls. We also strongly recommend that Plan develops strategies to work with men and their families complementary to engagements with girls’ families to tackle both the supply and demand for child marriage.

6.5 Cross-sectoral approach
As child marriage touches upon a range of socio-economic issues, no sector-specific intervention is likely to fully address the issue. Programmes should equip girls with knowledge, skills and attitudes that will support their empowerment.

We recommend that Plan’s prevention and response interventions in child marriage are multi-sectoral and address the risk levels of young girls holistically. We also recommend that Plan pursues its efforts regarding birth registrations and birth certificates to facilitate discussion on children’s rights and minimum age legislation.

6.6 From prevention to recompense
The literature review reveals a weak continuum of sustained and multifaceted support on child marriage from prevention (community sensitisation, for example) to response (interventions during the marital process to postpone union), to mitigation (enabling girls to stay in school after marriage, for example) and to recompense (actions to assist and empower already married girls) in the region.

We recommend that Plan clearly signposts each of its activities and/or its overall approach on an ‘early marriage intervention continuum’ and maximises opportunities to work with already married girls and women on each type of intervention.

6.7 Linking local and national work: evidence-based advocacy
The review found that while most activities are well articulated at community or local level, the national advocacy strategies that sustain them are more opaque. The review was not able to clearly identify national level advocacy messages disseminated by one or more partners or specific entry points for those.

We recommend that Plan develops a clear advocacy strategy for its work at national level and identify clearly its objectives in terms of national dialogue enablers, legislative frameworks, media strategy and partnership building. The strategy can be based on position papers child marriage developed alongside the Theory of Change.

6.8 Partnerships
Partners involved in child marriage reduction programmes vary depending on countries.

We recommend that Plan WARO builds strategic alliances with key players in the field, particularly: UNFPA, Unicef, Girls not Brides and the Population Council. We also strongly recommend that Plan sets up a reference group for its forthcoming work on child marriage at national level comprising Child Protection leads and regional experts on gender and children or adolescents.
6.9 Learning lessons
The importance of rigorous baseline assessments and well-defined, regular monitoring and evaluation is critical to building a body of evidence and good practice to end child marriage. Evaluating what works best and where will be essential for fine tuning interventions and to contribute to a robust body of evidence on drivers of change in West Africa.

Plan may be able to learn from evidence across programmes addressing HIV/AIDS or FGC, particularly on attitude and behaviour change. Additionally, a new sub-regional network of experts on child marriage, if coordinated, should align with the Regional Child Protection Learning Network which also has a mandate to identify and share best practice on child marriage (Plan 2013).

We recommend that Plan undertakes thorough baseline studies at the onset of the sub-regional initiative, part of which will include the development of comparable indicators for monitoring child marriage across countries. In addition to periodic progress evaluations, we also recommend that Plan develops robust documentation templates and tools in order to capture incremental learning on what interventions are working in what contexts and why, and on tipping points, or triggers, of positive change.

We strongly recommend that Plan facilitates the sharing of information across the four focal countries through a sub-regional network. The platform could be used for both Plan staff and national stakeholders to learn from each other, explore the replication of good practices and contribute to the development of capacities of those countries that are weaker.

6.10 Confronting the effects of crisis on child marriage
Niger, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso are in the top ten countries globally in terms of child marriage prevalence rate. They are also among the more fragile countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, with civil conflict in Northern Mali and the ongoing Ebola virus epidemic affecting Guinea contributing to increasing the fragility of states in the region. There is anecdotal and growing evidence that child marriage is particularly sensitive to crisis and instability.

We recommend that Plan monitors child marriage during emergencies and considers developing relevant, targeted action plans to tackle child marriage during sudden or ongoing crises. We also recommend that Plan learns and shares lessons about what work in crisis and post-crisis contexts.
Annex A: References


ICRW (2011). Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the evidence shows


Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2013). Cameroon: Prevalence of forced marriage in southern Cameroon, particularly in the Southwest Region, including state protection available; forced marriage as practiced by chiefs, and whether the girls or women that are forced to marry chiefs must be virgins and childless. Accessed online at http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/246760/356876_en.html


Ouagraogo, O. (n.d). Etude sur le rapt des filles dans la région de l’est. UNFPA


## Annex B: Interviewees

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>Allain Some</td>
<td>Plan Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Child Protection Adviser</td>
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<td>Molly Melching</td>
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<td>Stella Nkrumah-Ababio</td>
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<td>Child Protection Adviser</td>
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Annex C: Overview of Plan Country Offices

Burkina Faso
Plan Burkina Faso operates in five PUs across eight provinces:
- South West: four provinces - Bougouriba, Ioba, Poni and Noumbiel.
- North-Central: two provinces - Bam and Sanmatenga
- East: two provinces - Namentenga and Kourritenga.

Plan has been working in Burkina Faso since 1976 – the longest of all four focal countries. The current CSP (2012-2015) references the issue of child marriage four times including in its background section, in which it cites Unicef prevalence data, and under Country Programme 3 Child Protection. Plan’s objective to provide ‘support for the social rehabilitation of girls who are victims of early/unwanted marriages’ is given under CP3 ‘Contributing to a safe environment’ specifically ‘fighting violence against children’ (p.45). This articulates child marriage as a form of violence against children and positions Plan Burkina’s work to address the phenomenon under a child protection and safe environments framework.

In addition to child protection, Plan Burkina has three additional programmes: (i) survival and development, focused on addressing child mortality and morbidity through sexual and reproductive health and IMCI; (ii) education, focused on providing quality basic education through good school governance and support to education systems; (iii) household economic security.

Guinea
Plan started working in Guinea in 1989 in the southern Forest region and as such it has been known as ‘Plan Forest Region’. However, the move of the country office to Conakry and inception of a programme zone in and around the capital city in the poorest areas of Kindia region will enlarge Plan’s geographic coverage. Until then, Plan works in five Forest prefectures (sub-regional divisions) predominantly in rural areas and with a range of ethnic groups in N’zerekore and Yomou prefectures in Zalekwele; Masenta; Kissidougou; Guekedou.

The current CSP (2013-17) identifies the root cause of poor children’s rights to the family, the ‘traditional mindset, attitudes, illiteracy, approval of domestic violence, income poverty that leads to child exploitation’ (p.6). The CSP repeatedly notes that traditions at family level are the driver of violations of children’s rights.

Niger
Plan has been working in Niger since 1998. It currently works with 76 villages across two PUs in the south of Niger: Dosso & Tillabéri. Each PU is about 150km from the capital city, Niamey, towards the border with Burkina Faso. Dosso is less than 100km from Nigeria.

Mali
Plan Mali operates in four PUs across three regions in the centre and south of the country: Ségou region, Barouéli district; Koulikoro region: Kangaba and Kati districts; Kayes region: Kita district.
Mali’s new CSP (2012 -2016), Programme 2 ‘Safe Children’ includes the objective:
- ‘By 2016 there will be a significant reduction in the number of communities practising female genital cutting and in the incidences of child marriage among Plan partner communities’ (Plan, 2013).
Specific projects to protect children from harmful practices are planned.