



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



## The value of early marriage in Amhara Region, Ethiopia.

*Exploring local understandings of early marriage in a context of active prevention activities and a prohibitive legal framework.*

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## Abstract

While marriage under 18 is legally prohibited in Ethiopia and many NGOs are working on the prevention of early marriage (EM), in Amhara region prevalence is still as high as 45%. This research aims to gain insight into why EM is still a widespread practice in Amhara region despite these state and NGO efforts and explores how EM is valued locally. Existing research has generally focused on the consequences of EM and on the link between EM and education, often regarding early marriage as a violation of human rights or harmful traditional practice. This study critically engages with these ‘mainstream approaches’ towards early marriage that are argued to be western-centric and that tend to gloss over the complex nature and local realities of early marriage. This research aims to provide an alternative approach by giving voice to local bodies of theory such as African feminists and by exploring EM through local people’s perceptions and realities.

Applying Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Framework in a context-specific manner, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how individual, micro- and meso-level actors and their interrelationships shape local understandings of early marriage. Using a combination of different qualitative research methods, this research examines how different actors such as girls, caregivers, teachers and religious leaders value EM and how these values are taken into account by local NGOs working on EM prevention in Amhara Region. For the purpose of this study sixty-three in-depth interviews and two Focus Group Discussions were conducted with the various actors involved.

The results show large differences between how different actors value early marriage. While in-school girls and teachers strongly stand against early marriage and emphasize its negative health aspects – thereby linking directly to NGOs anti-early marriage messages – other actor groups, such as caregivers, emphasize the economic value early marriage can have for families of the married individuals. This study reveals that since NGOs mainly target their prevention efforts on in-school girls and teachers, they fail to take into consideration the perceptions of other actor groups in society. This research concludes by providing recommendations as to how local values can better be taken into account in prevention efforts and recommendations on how to incorporate local perspectives in studies on early marriage.

**Key words:** early marriage, Bioecological Framework, Amhara region, values, NGOs

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CM	Child Marriage
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEC	Development Expertise Center
EM	Early Marriage
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practice
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-profit Law
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
KPN	Kinderpostzegels Nederland
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PPCT	Process Person Context Time
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
UDHR	United Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VoC	Value of Children
WCAT	Wabe Children Aid & Training
WSO	Women Speaker Office

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Early Marriage and Values: Making the Connection

*“I am fifteen years old from Herat  
A few have come as suitors and I am confused  
I am perplexed by this tradition and by these people  
They sell girls for money. No right to choose”*

This is what Sonita Alizadeh from Afghanistan raps in her rap video “Brides for Sale” (2014) to encourage girls to stand up against child marriage. Sonita managed to escape the two forced marriages that her parents had planned for her at the age of 10 and 15 and is now an activist fighting against child marriage (from the documentary “Sonita”, 2015).

Worldwide, more than 700 million women are married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday today (UNICEF, 2015). Early Marriage (EM) – defined as a marriage or informal union before age 18 (UNICEF, 2014) – is most prevalent in South East Asia and in Sub Saharan Africa. Worldwide, Ethiopia is among the top ten countries with the highest EM rates (Gage, 2013). Although boys can be married under 18 too, EM disproportionately affects girls and young women (Mutgan, 2014). Because of this, EM is seen as a manifestation of gender inequality, reflecting social norms that perpetuate discrimination against girls (Mutyaba, 2011; UNICEF, 2015).

There exists general consensus in international circles, among activists and academics that girls who get married before they are 18 years old are not physically, emotionally and mentally prepared for their roles as mothers and wives (see e.g. UNCRC, 1989; Tilson & Larson, 2000; Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Ansell, 2005; ICRW, 2007; Mutyaba, 2011; UNICEF, 2015). The consequences of getting married before 18 on the lives of girls are enormous, illustrated by the finding as reported in Ansell (2005) that girls who give birth before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday are two to five times more likely to die in childbirth in comparison to older women. Additionally, research in Ethiopia has found that giving birth at such a young age is directly related to higher levels of child mortality (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003), HIV/AIDS (Molla, Berhane & Lindtjørn, 2008) and depression (Raj, 2010). Besides these health risks, EM brings about major social implications that

influence girls' futures (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009), such as higher chances of dropping out of school (Tilson & Larson, 2000), reduced decision-making power in the household (Jensen & Thornton, 2003) and higher levels of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). As a result, EM is believed to perpetuate poverty, including in Ethiopia, and to contribute to the feminization thereof (ibid.).

Because of these major consequences for girls' lives, there is an increased international concern about the high prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia (ICRW, 2007). This concern is shared by the Ethiopian government, which has supported and ratified different international declarations that condemn EM, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989, article 24). The Ethiopian constitution regards EM as a 'Harmful Traditional Practice' and has prohibited the practice since 1994 (FDRE, 1994; UNICEF 2016). In addition to efforts made by the government, many NGOs have been and are still working on the prevention and 'eradication' of EM in Ethiopia (Emirie, 2005). However, despite this rejection by both government and NGOs, EM is still commonplace. Early marriage is especially problematic in Amhara Region – the region where this research was conducted – where prevalence can be as high as 45% (UNICEF, 2016).

To be able to explore this gap between prevention activities and a prohibitive legal framework on the one hand, and high prevalence rates on the other hand, it is important to develop a better understanding of the - continued - practice of EM. Specifically, it is essential to identify why people continue to practice early marriage and what importance different people attach to EM. This study focuses on how early marriage is valued by the various actors involved in the process, including girls, caregivers and teachers. In addition, this study is concerned with the ways in which NGOs, that seek to address this issue, take the local values of early marriage into account. Thus, this research aims to answer the following main research question:

*“How do different key actors value early marriage of girls and young women in Amhara region in Ethiopia and how do local NGOs take into account these local understandings in early marriage prevention efforts?”*

Applying Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) to answer this question, this study is able to capture the complex construction of values throughout the layers of different environments, proximal processes and individual characteristics. The notion of values can be broad and multifaceted, in this study 'values' are conceptualised as essentially social constructs that are negotiated collectively (Kippax & Stephenson, 2005). Consequently, this research focuses on how the different actors – as identified within the Bioecological model – shape the interpersonal construct of value and how they influence each other. This study departs from the point that EM is a gendered, complex phenomenon that needs to be regarded within the unique lived reality, wherein people are experts in their own lives (Arndt, 2002; Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Goredema, 2010). Subsequently, an exploratory, dynamic approach is taken when approaching the topic, which corresponds to the intentioned use of the model for 'science in discovery mode', as described by Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000).

Taking this interdisciplinary, exploratory approach to unravel and explore the complex issue of EM in Amhara Region, this study is expected to contribute to creating safer environments, where young women can grow up, live freely and build their future without fear of being forced into marriage.

## **1.2 Academic and Practical Relevance of this Study**

This research is a relevant contribution to the already existing body of academic literature on early marriage in Ethiopia, a country with a unique, specific context surrounding EM.

Despite the increasing attention that has been given to early marriage and its negative implications in literature (see e.g. Tilson & Larson, 2000; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Jensen & Thornton, 2003), little is known about the knowledge and beliefs of individuals that are in control of negotiating early marriages and of the social context in which these individuals function (Gage, 2013). This study aims to fill this void by focusing on how different actors within the local community, such as girls and their caregivers, perceive and value early marriage.

Attempts to study early marriage in the "South", have often originated from the "West", using western-based (human) rights-based discourse (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). These attempts have been criticized for being western-

centric and glossing over local lived realities (Rana, 2007; Fennell & Arnot, 2008). Taking this into account, this study is attentive to ideas and principles drawn from African feminisms. Moreover, this study aspires to collect data by applying an established western, Bioecological Model based from psychology, in its full strength (but culturally sensitive—Triandis and Brislin, 1984) to the values attached to EM in Ethiopia. Such attempt aims to contribute to bridging the asymmetry between the way academics study ‘traditional’ practices, such as EM, in the North and South.

This study aims to contribute to the academic debate by adding insight into local people’s values and perceptions on EM. Furthermore, the study aims to inspire debate on bridging the gap between northern and southern ways of viewing and studying EM. The research directly adds to the development practice, as data as well as the end report will be shared with the main facilitating NGO Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland. Additionally, other NGOs have requested and received a summary of this thesis with concrete points of attention for early marriage programs in Amhara region Ethiopia.

### 1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. Since this research is highly context-specific, it is important to develop a clear understanding of the legal, cultural and socioeconomic factors around early marriage in Ethiopia. In Chapter two (‘Research Context’) the research is therefore placed into the local context of Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Subsequently, Chapter three (‘Theoretical Framework’) provides a theoretical framework that analyses and links up the different key concepts and theories underpinning this research. Chapter four (‘Research Design’) makes the link between theory and practice by detailing the way in which the data were acquired and analysed in the field. With regard to the sensitive nature of the topic of early marriage, specific attention is given to ethical considerations and reflections on challenges that came up in the field. Chapter five (‘Values of Early Marriage: the Individual Level’) and six (‘Values of Early Marriage: the Micro- and Mesolevel’) present the results of the data analysis. These data chapters are critically analysed by using the theoretical framework presented in Chapter two. Chapter five focuses on girls’ values of early marriage and provides an answer to the following sub questions: *How do girls value EM at the individual level? How do personal characteristics influence how girls value*

*early marriage? How do local NGO- workers and activities appear to influence girls' values of early marriage? How do NGOs take girls' understandings of early marriage into account?* Chapter six focuses on how key actors important to girls value early marriage. This chapter answers the following questions: *How do key actors at micro-level such as caregivers, religious leaders and teachers value early marriage? How are these values shaped? How do different actors appear to influence each other's value of early marriage? How do local NGO- workers and activities appear to influence different actors' values of early marriage? How do NGOs take understandings regarding early marriage of local key actors into account?* Both data chapters end with an overview of the results and discuss the results in relation with the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter seven ('Discussion and Conclusion') presents a conclusion by answering the main research questions of this thesis, integrating all previous chapters. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the findings of this study more in-depth in relation to the theoretical framework and provides a reflection on the entire research project. This chapter also gives the limitations of the current research and the implications for future research.

## 2. Research Context

### 2.1 Introduction

This research is highly context specific; therefore this chapter provides extensive information on the Ethiopian and Amharic context in which the research took place. This information is important as it provides the backdrop to key choices that were made during the research process and to be able to place the results into the local context. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of the political, legal and the socioeconomic context of early marriage in Ethiopia. Finally, the chapter describes the research location and population and introduces the NGOs that facilitated the research.

### 2.2 Political and Legal Context

#### *2.2.1 International Standards and National Legal Framework*

Ethiopia signed and ratified many international declarations that condemn discrimination against women and girls and the practice of early marriage, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948; article 16), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979; article 16) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989; article 24, 34 & 35). The principles provided in these declarations function as a foundation for the Ethiopian constitution and national legal framework on EM (Yohannes & Assefa, ND). The Ethiopian Constitution (1994) details provisions with regard to women's position, assures equal rights between men and women and states that affirmative action should be taken to restore past inequalities and suffering of women because of this. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government has publicized a list of 73 Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) that are punishable by law, which also includes child marriage (FDRE, 1994).

However, there seems to be a gap between progressive legislation at national level and the reality at local level. The large majority of the Ethiopians (85%) live in rural areas with bad (communication) infrastructure and high illiteracy rates. According to Emirie (2005) most people in these areas are not aware of the legislation and the legislation is often not strictly enforced. With regard to EM in particular, Gage (2013) states that knowledge of the legal minimum age for marriage varies

greatly per community, depending on exposure to mass media and interpersonal communication on the topic of legislation. She argues that because many people are not aware of the international standards and national legislation, EM prevalence continues to be high in the country (ibid.).

### *2.2.2 Legal Pluralism*

In Ethiopia there is a system of legal pluralism. This means that in addition to the official legal system, there is a customary law system in place, that is, a traditional way of solving conflicts using customary and cultural rituals (Abdo & Abegaz, 2009; Enyew, 2014). The customary law system is a system based on unwritten laws that are passed on to new generations verbally. The elder figures and religious leaders of the community are leading the juridical process (Wourji, 2012). The system is based on restorative justice instead of on conventional justice. This means, according to Enyew (2014), that the focus is on reconciliation and restoring the situation within the community instead of merely on punishment.

Hussen (2009) explains how the Ethiopian Constitution (1994) has officially recognized this traditional and cultural way for settling disputes and conflicts. The constitution presumes that both systems (the official and customary system) can operate in parallel and cooperation with each other. The systems can complement each other in the sense that cases on local smaller issues such as land disputes, cattle thefts and family matters can be settled by the customary law system, while heavier crimes have to be handled by the formal legal system. It seems that early marriage disputes can be tried within both legal systems (Abdo & Abegaz, 2009).

As Wourji (2012) notes, the practice of customary law in Ethiopia is still widespread and common, mainly in rural communities. Reasons for the rural community to prefer this system to the official system are that the official system can be too remote, costly and that it involves too much delay. On the other hand, the customary system is believed to become slightly more irrelevant in recent years due to a modernising society and to increasing urbanisation (ibid.). In addition, Hussen (2009) and Wourji (2012) argue that, the customary system is perceived to be discriminatory against women because women cannot actively participate in the legal process and need to be represented by a male family member.

### *2.2.3 Position of NGOs in Ethiopia*

In the past, various efforts have been made to decrease or ‘eradicate’ the practice of EM in Ethiopia. In addition to the legal steps that have been taken to prohibit EM, many NGO- and CSO-projects have been implemented that focused on education and EM (Emirie, 2005). Ethiopia was a country that had a strong infrastructure that supported CSOs and NGOs. Nega and Milofsky (2011) argue that because of this supportive infrastructure, Ethiopia has a long-standing NGO presence, which stimulated the democratic process, the economic situation and the living conditions of people. The new revolutionary government in the 1990s supported NGO- and CSO-presence in the country in order to stimulate development. However, Nega and Milofsky (2011) argue that since 2004 the Ethiopian government feels threatened by the extensive NGO-presence and has become increasingly authoritarian.

As a result, the current working situation for NGOs has become more complicated. In 2009, an “anti-NGO law” was passed by the Ethiopian government, which highly constrains NGOs working in the country (ibid.). This law prohibits NGOs that receive more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources from participating in essentially all human rights and advocacy activities (ICNL, 2016). The International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL, 2016) reports that this has resulted in a decrease in international organizations working on sensitive topics such as EM in Ethiopia after 2004. Nega and Milofsky (2011) argue that this restricted environment for NGOs not only leads to less NGO- and CSO-activity, but also poses a threat for economic development in Ethiopia.

## **2.3 Socioeconomic Context**

### *2.3.1 Cultural and Religious Identity*

Ethiopia is a unique country in Africa because it is the only country that has never been colonized by a western power. This has led to a proud nation with strong traditional practices and a unique cultural identity (Erulkar, Mekbib, Simie & Gulema, 2004). According to authors such as Habtu (2003) and Haustein and Østebø (2011) Ethiopian society is a strongly traditional and patriarchal one, which places women in lower positions than men. Because of the collectivistic nature of Ethiopian society, family ties and institutes such as marriage are highly valued. Bonds between

families created by marriages are the social insurance that people can fall back on in case of need. Furthermore, the – increasingly scarcer – farmland and thus possession is divided based on family ties (Karbo, 2013). Therefore marriage can be an instrument to strengthen a families' social and economic position. Habtu (2003) states that with regard to family matter such as marriage, men are generally in charge of making decisions.

Religion and religious leaders also play a dominant role in Ethiopian society. In Ethiopia there is a freedom of religion due to the separation of state and religion (Haustein & Østebø, 2011). The countries' population is divided into 62.8% Christian and 33.9% Muslim. In Amhara Region the population is mainly Ethiopian Orthodox (99.6%) and deeply religious, although Haustein and Østebø (2011) report that influence of the church on peoples' daily life is decreasing slowly. Despite this decrease, traditional religious norms still prevail in many aspects of society. The church is said to be actively involved in all the important issues and events such as marriage, town meetings and the customary legal system (Karbo, 2013). The opinions of elders and religious leaders are highly valued both within the family and within the community.

### *2.3.2 Early Marriage and Formal Education*

The overall level of formal education in Ethiopia is very low. Currently, 50.3% of the boys and 29.3% of the girls attend primary school. The literacy rate is 41% for men and 21% for women (ICRW, 2007). These numbers display a large difference in school attendance between girls and boys. In addition to this difference in attendance based on gender, Erulkar et al. (2004) came across two other disparities with regard to school attendance in Ethiopia; a disparity based on region and a disparity between urban and rural areas. These disparities interact with each other and indicate that girls who live in a rural area within a vulnerable region are the least likely to attend and finish school.

Emirie (2005) also states that in addition to having lower participation rates in education, girls achieve lower school results in comparison to boys. The most common reason for boys and girls not to attend school is poverty, followed by EM for girls and too many work responsibilities for boys (Erulkar et al., 2004). Research conducted by Emirie (2005) in the Amhara Region found a direct link between

primary school attendance and age of marriage in the sense that there appears to be a strong reciprocal relationship between EM and dropping out of school.

## 2.4 Research Location and Population

The research for this thesis was conducted between May and August 2015 in Amhara Region in Ethiopia. More specifically, it took place in South Gondar Administrative Zone, in Farta Woreda (as indicated in Figure 1). I was based in Debre Tabor, which is located in the centre of Farta Woreda (District) but is not a part of the district itself. Farta Woreda has a population of 232,181 people, of which 97% is rural. The average size of a household is 4.6 persons. Almost all of the inhabitants are Amharic as ethnicity (99.9%). The large majority in this district is religious, 99.6% practices Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as religion (EDHS, 2011). From Debre Tabor eight different *kebeles* (local communities or villages) have been visited for the research. An overview of the kebeles that were visited is provided in Chapter four.

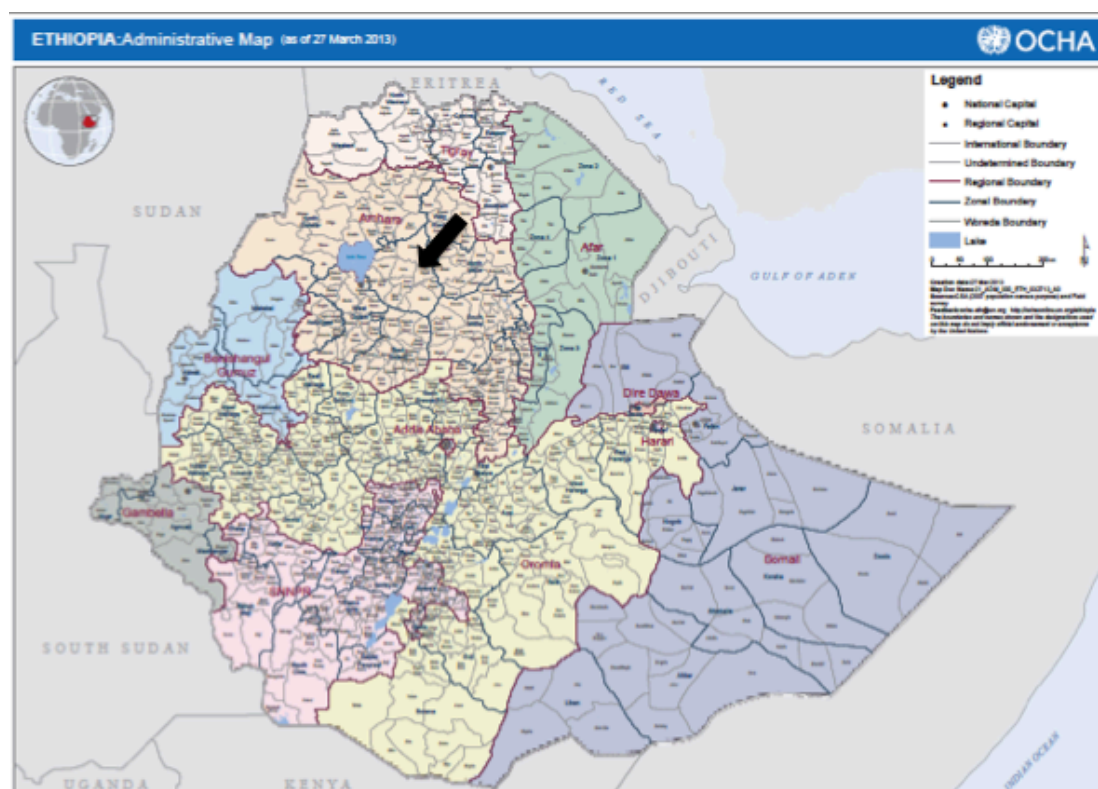


Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia, Amhara Region and Farta Woreda (OCHA, 2013).

## 2.5 Facilitating Organizations

Access to the research population has been acquired through cooperation with three different organizations. The main facilitating organization was Stichting Kinderpostzegels. Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland is a Dutch foundation that focuses on the protection and development of vulnerable children. On a yearly basis, Stichting Kinderpostzegels funds hundreds of projects focused on children under 18 years old, both in the Netherlands and abroad. The foundation gathers funds and cooperates with partner organizations and local project partners (Stichting Kinderpostzegels, 2014). For this research, Kinderpostzegels established contact with the Development Expertise Center (DEC).

DEC is an Ethiopian Child Centred Organization, based in Addis Ababa. Through efforts of both Kinderpostzegels and DEC, contact was established with Wabe Children Aid and Training (WCAT). WCAT is a local NGO that works with children from marginalized families and community groups in order to improve their lives through education- and skills training- based integrated development approaches (Wabe Children Aid & Training, 2014). WCAT is based in Addis Ababa and has field offices throughout the country (Amhara- & Oromia-Region). For this research collaboration has been established with the WCAT Field Office in Debre Tabor. This office provided this research with access to the research population in Farta Woreda. Additionally, WCAT is the organization that provided local supervision, practical support and assistance with interpretation.

## 2.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter gave an overview of the main context in which this research is based. In the chapter I briefly described the complex political, legal and socioeconomic context surrounding early marriage in Ethiopia. The chapter detailed a context where early marriage is officially legally prohibited, but where law enforcement is complicated and where an additional customary legal system is in place. Furthermore, the complicated situation for NGOs working on EM-prevention and the large disparities in both society and in education were discussed. The next chapter provides the theoretical framework on which this research is based.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a theoretical framework that relates the different concepts that are used to study early marriage in this research. Section 2.1 critically engages with key concepts underpinning this research, such as early marriage, ‘Harmful Traditional Practice’ and values. Subsequently, Section 2.2 discusses and criticizes several mainstream approaches to early marriage such as sociocultural-, economic- and rights-based approaches. Furthermore, Section 3.3 elaborates on the basis for my study, and first engages with African feminisms as an alternative approach to EM. Consequently, Bronfenbrenner’s Process-Person-Context-Time Model (PPCT-Model) is introduced as a structuring tool that is used to analyse the values of early marriage. Lastly, the PPCT-Model is adapted into the conceptual framework of this study. Section 3.4 provides an overview of key points presented in this chapter.

### 3.2 The Main Concepts in This Research

#### *3.2.1 The Concept of Early Marriage*

First of all, child marriage is, both in international policies and within literature, commonly defined as: ‘a formal marriage or informal union before age 18’ (UNWOMEN, 2012; UNICEF, 2014). This definition is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child that states that a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years old, unless the law states that majority is reached at an earlier age (UNCRC, 1989; art. 1). This definition is used in Ethiopian legislation on the topic as well, since Ethiopia is one of the countries that ratified the UNCRC (1989) and incorporated its principles into national legislation (Yohannes & Assefa, ND). The discourse on child marriage is based on the ‘childhood’ concept that has been proposed in the UNCRC (1989), in which ‘childhood’ is universally recognized to be a carefree period in life and the time that is spent in school for children until the age of 18 years. Archambault (2011) argues that the term child marriage is powerfully constituted as it simultaneously signifies an appropriate and inappropriate age for marriage and implies that a child is ought to do something else (like pursuing an education) during this period of childhood.

However, scholars such as Ansell (2005) and Bunting (2005) question and

criticize the use of the age limit of 18 as the distinction between children and adults in this context. Ansell (2005), for example, argues that this distinction puts too much focus on western points of transition into adulthood such as leaving parents' home or beginning work. These points of transition may not be crucial points in the lives of people in other parts of the world, where this transition might be more complex. In other words, focusing on western points of transition does not take the cultural specificity of childhood sufficiently into account (Bunting, 2005). In other parts of the world points of transition into adulthood might be perceived at another age. Therefore, the western-based boundary age of 18 might not be that meaningful in, for example, Ethiopia.

The dominant discourse around early marriage is usually framed by large development organizations and grounded in notions of human rights (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Callaghan, Gambo & Fellin, 2015). When this discourse is discussing child marriage, the right to full and free consent takes a central place. Human rights discourse argues that since a person under age 18 is not deemed capable of giving her/his informed consent to enter into marriage, child marriages or early marriages are always considered to be forced marriages. (Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1964; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003). However, James (2010) argues that international organisations that position girls as victims often obscure the agency and voices of girls themselves in their responses to early marriage. In this way, the construction of child marriage tends to focus on forced and arranged marriages and leaves no room for possible consent of 'the child'. However, as Callaghan et al. (2015) argue, young women also practice agency, make choices in a context of cultural expectations and have the ability to resist certain cultural practices.

Subsequently, authors such as Chantler (2012) argue that research on marriage issues should be conducted without privileging Euro-American norms around individual choices regarding love and marriage that sometimes tend to determine research agenda's. In this thesis, I therefore look at marriage as a social construct whereby girls (and other local actors) are considered as experts in their own lives. This means that I let the perceptions, experiences and values of girls determine what marriage means to them.

Finally, international organizations and governments use the term ‘child marriage’ for development programs that are focused on this issue. However, the term ‘early marriage’ is more common within the academic debates on this topic. Therefore, I will use the term ‘early marriage’ in this thesis as this term does not have the presumed connotations of the discourse around the ‘(girl) child’ and what this child should be like or do.

### *3.2.2 Conceptualisation of EM as HTP*

The UN conceptualizes early marriage as a ‘Harmful Traditional Practice’ (UN Fact Sheet 23, 1995). This means that the UN considers EM to be a traditional practice that is detrimental to the health and status of women or children. This conceptualisation was adopted by the Ethiopian government in national legislation on the topic (FDRE, 1994). The concept of HTPs has been criticized, however.

Firstly, there is general critique on the conceptualisation of EM as a HTP, stating this conceptualisation is too western-centric (Winter, Thompson & Jeffreys, 2002). On this view, the perception of EM as a HTP is underpinned by the western rejection of HTPs and glosses over the importance that EM might have for people that practice it (Savell, 2008). Savell (2008) argues that this conceptualisation tries to impose the western perspective, and suppresses and devalues local culture. This devaluation of local culture also comes to the fore in the fact that in efforts to ‘eradicate’ HTPs, HTPs are often conceptualised as a struggle against local culture in general (Merry, 2003). Merry (2003) argues that this “*demonization of local culture*” is a sign of preference of western perspective above local culture (p. 55). The fact that the concepts ‘Harmful’ and ‘Traditional’ are used together in the term HTP also shows the implied strong association between both concepts.

Furthermore, critics pose that the UN approach towards HTPs is overly concerned with a west vs. non-west distinction (Omeje, 2001; Winter et al., 2002). Winter et al. (2002) argue, for example, that this approach links HTP and violence against women to non-western countries and cultures while ignoring similar practices in western countries. That is, practices such as circumcision and marriage under 18 that take place in western countries are generally not conceptualised as HTPs. Selectively addressing these issues only in non-western countries and cultures is a sign of bias in the sense that it stigmatizes certain countries and cultures as ‘backward’ (Winter et al., 2002).

Additionally, Omeje (2001) states that it is important to realize that what are called HTPs in Africa nowadays are in fact multidimensional traditions, which have developed over many years. Because of the complexity of these traditions, it is necessary to look beyond the notion of ‘HTP’ and understand where practices deemed harmful come from, and why and how they are still valued locally. Archambault (2011) adds to this by stating that engaging in an EM can stem from a contemporary adaptation to livelihood security. Engaging in an EM can, for example, lead to a direct improvement in a young woman’s economic situation and more social acceptance, and can thereby improve the position of a girl and her family in society. Concluding, conceptualizing EM as a HTP inherently attaches certain negative values to EM, glossing over the complexity of the phenomenon. Defining EM as an HTP is increasingly recognised as based on a western-centric – and thus limited – point of view. In view of these reasons, EM is neither described nor considered as a HTP during the course of this study.

### **3.2.3 Concept of Values**

Central to this research is the notion of ‘values’, or more specifically ‘values of EM’. Therefore, it is important to further clarify the concept of values. In doing so, it is important to notice, as Peacock and McFadden (2015) emphasize, that personal values always exist in relation to cultural values and are in addition shaped by own experiences and thought. Values can be in agreement or disagreement with prevailing values and norms within a culture (ibid.). Kelsen (1966) explains, that the difference between values and norms is that values are broadened and more abstract. While norms are standards or rules that determine what one should do in a certain situation, values are of a more abstract nature defining what is seen as important within a culture.

In literature, there are many theories on values, stemming from a variety of disciplines, like ethics, economy, anthropology and psychology. In this study, values are regarded from an anthropological viewpoint, in that a value is defined as “*the importance of social action through which people demonstrate their belief in what is the good life.*” (Graeber, 2001: p.11). Graeber (2001) argues, that every choice in life consists of social actions and that we attach a certain importance or meaning to these actions. The importance we attach to each action demonstrates which things we value in our lives. In the case of EM, this means that the concept of EM consists of many

actions such as the action to engage in EM or the action to reject an EM. The importance and meanings that are attached to these actions form a person's valuing of EM. This illustrates the close relation between values and meaning.

Therefore the concept of “*meaning*” as specified by Kippax and Stephenson (2005, p. 362) is used as a foundation for conceptualising the ‘values of early marriage’ in this study. The authors state that meanings attached to a certain practice is essentially social because meaning is negotiated collectively between people. Both values and meanings are highly variable and not stable over time, place or person. Building on Kippax and Stephenson (2005), the values of EM in this research refer to the meanings that are attached to engaging in early marriage at a particular moment in time by and between different actors that are involved in the early marriage process in Amhara Region. Because Kippax and Stephenson (2005) emphasize that meanings are negotiated between people, this research involves different actors and examines how they value EM and how their values interact and influence each other's values.

### **3.3 Mainstream Approaches to Early Marriage**

Theories and debates surrounding the topic of early marriage are numerous and complex. With regard to the theories explaining EM, Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans (2014) note that different explanations may apply to different regions and to different times. Moreover, early marriage in one specific region at one specific time can have multiple explanations, because there are many factors or forces that influence it. The forces, which promote and sustain early marriage, are usually expressed in terms of socio-cultural, economic and legal factors (Emirie, 2005). In order to broadly engage with the topic of EM, this section attempts to review and critically engage with the most established or ‘mainstream’ perspectives on early marriage. In this context, the reviewed literature on early marriage is structured into three different frameworks: sociocultural approaches, economic approaches and rights-based approaches.

### 3.3.1 Sociocultural Approaches

According to Gorodnichenko and Roland (2015, p. 1) culture is commonly defined as:

*“The set of values and beliefs people have about how the world (both nature and society) works as well as the norms of behaviour derived from that set of values.”*

In other words, a culture contains sociocultural norms and values that guide people's choices and behaviour. Sociocultural approaches tend to focus on relating 'individual' decisions to the cultural, historical and religious context in which people live (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). As such, these approaches use norms of culture, tradition and religion as explanations for practices such as early marriage. Authors such as Uddin (2015) argue that socio-cultural norms have a strong effect on the average age of first marriages in every society. The specific socio-cultural and religious norms and values that are attached to early marriage differ highly per country, within countries and per culture.

Consequently, several efforts have been made to categorize cultures into 'types' of culture. An example of such a typology of cultures is that of Hofstede (1991), who argues that all cultures can be categorised along five dimensions such as collectivity-individuality, masculinity and power distance. More specifically, some scholars link the prevalence of EM to a certain 'type' of culture. An example of this are Dion and Dion (1993) who argue that early marriage is more prevalent in

*“Individualism can be defined as the ‘subordination of the goals of the collective to the goals of the individual’, while collectivism is defined as the opposite, namely, ‘the subordination of individual goals to the goals of the collective’.”*

- Dion & Dion, 1993, p. 54

#### Textbox 1. Collectivism vs. Individualism

'collectivistic' than in 'individualistic' cultures, due to different perspectives on love, marriage and gender roles that are held in both types of cultures (see Textbox 1). However, this dichotomous framing of cultures has been widely criticized for being too simplistic, for making collectivistic and individualistic seem like opposites and for glossing over important nuances that both types of cultures share (Schwartz, 1990). Eyetsemitan and Gire (2003) emphasize that not using these terms correctly leads to the misrepresentation of collectivistic societies as underdeveloped and individualistic societies at the other end of the development path, namely developed.

Furthermore, authors such as Herzfeld (2000) and Fiske (2002) argue that drawing strict distinctions between types of cultures on any kind of criteria, incorrectly assumes - among other things - culture as static, bounded and knowable.

Consequently, it is important to not solely focus on ‘types’ of cultures but to look at the many specific norms and values within a certain culture that play a role in the decision to engage in an EM. Three norms that scholars argue to be linked to the decision to engage in EM in Ethiopian society are listed here.

Firstly, like Teferi (2014) argues, the power relations within a society are of influence on norms regarding EM. He argues that in a society that contains many patriarchal elements - like Ethiopia - there are cultural and religious beliefs and practices in place that undermine women’s status and that contribute to gender-based discrimination. As such, priority is given to the masculine instead of the feminine in different settings, such as school, household, labour market and community. According to Sultana (2010), within societies with more patriarchal elements men are considered to be economic producers while women are regarded as reproducers who are dependent on men. As such, lower importance is attached to schooling for girls than boys, which in turn leads to higher drop out rates and higher EM rates among girls (Tilson & Larson, 2000).

Secondly, retaining virginity until marriage, in order to preserve a girls’ and her families’ honour, is an important norm that influences EM in Ethiopia (Molla, Berhane & Lindtjørn, 2008). Raj (2010) explains that the high importance that society and potential marriage partners attach to virginity and chastity together with the fact that virginity tends to decrease with age, can lead to a family deciding to engage in EM in order to protect a girl from wanted or unwanted premarital sex.

Thirdly, societies have traditionally put norms into place that regulate fertility (Munshi & Myaux, 2006). Gorodnichenko and Roland (2012) argue that in supposedly ‘collectivistic’ societies, fertility of a woman is considered important and is valued highly. Research conducted by Tilson and Larson (2000) indicates that fertility is highly valued in Ethiopian society. The authors described, among other things, the apparent relationship between childlessness and divorce in Ethiopian society. Because of the value of fertility, families often reason that the younger a girl is at marriage, the higher chances are she will produce a large family, leading to EM.

With these three EM-related norms in mind – regarding masculinity, virginity and fertility – sociocultural approaches regard efforts to influence social and religious norms and empowering girls as central to addressing EM. Wahhaj (2014) adds to this by stating that it is important to realise that decisions regarding EM, although they are

made within a single household, may be influenced by choices and opinions of other households and influential actors in the community. Therefore, involving the community as a whole (Karam, 2015) and engaging in dialogue with community leaders and religious leaders (Wodon, 2015) is considered an effective strategy for EM-related interventions (see Textbox 2).

*“Because culture is a phenomenon which is deeply embedded in the individual and the group, to change or dislodge it may require a process of influencing those who practice that culture through education and mobilisation rather than the instrumentality of legislation or policy alone.”*

- Rembe, Chabaya, Wadesango &

Muhuro, 2011, p. 69.

Points of critique on sociocultural approaches generally focus on these approaches being too limited. Actors such as Nour (2009), Raj (2010) and Archambault (2011) argue that by only focusing on cultural and religious norms in society, these approaches tend to overlook other important factors playing a role in EM, such as the economic situation of a family (Archambault, 2011), the legislation and legal enforcement in a country (Raj, 2010) or the health consequences (Alemu, 2008; Nour, 2009).

#### Textbox 2. Influencing

### 3.3.2 Economic Approaches

Economic approaches use economic reasons and factors to explain the phenomenon of EM. According to economists, people behave in a certain way because they try to maximally satisfy their *preferences* given their *limited options* (Bicchieri, 2014). For example, parents might *prefer* to provide their families with sufficient food and money, but their financial resources are *limited*. Regarding the fact that girls are less likely to need educational skills in their household work and to bring in money for the family, parents may decide to take their daughter out of school instead of their son.

A specific idea within economic approaches is the focus on the economic value a child has for the household, which might differ in ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ countries (Schultz, 1974). Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) describe this as follows:

*“In less developed countries children have economic value, as well in the present as in old age. In developed countries, however, children are an economic liability.”* (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973, p. 23).

This idea is further explained with the Value of Children (VoC) Theory, as proposed by Friedman, Hechter and Kanazawa (1994). This theory states that decisions and ideas regarding family matters are predominantly based on rational, uncertainty reduction arguments. Trommsdorff and Nauck (2010) argue that this theory has gained increasing importance due to continuing demographic changes in the world and geographical spread of phenomena such as early marriage. According to these approaches, reasons to engage in EM in Ethiopia are often economically motivated, in the sense that girls are considered as either of economic value or as an economic burden for their families. In other words, parents may assess the costs and benefits of marriage and decide to marry daughters if they are considered as economic burden that can be relieved through marriage (Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton & Wodon, 2015).

Engaging in early marriage can lead to short-term economic benefits for the family, in terms of money, cattle and land. An EM can give the family access to these material benefits, because the family of the husband has to pay a considerable bride price to the bride's family (Alemu, 2008). Wahhaj (2014) reports that the younger the bride is, the higher the bride price is that has to be paid. On the longer term, as Raj (2010) argues, keeping the girls in the family house and paying for education poses a continuous economic burden on the parents and the rest of the family. Another economically-based reason to engage in EM, is that in Ethiopia it is considered desirable for children to marry when the two parents are still young so that the children's future is economically secured before the parents get old and die (Assefa et al., 2005). In conclusion, the decision to marry off a girl early in life can be based on the economic value the marriage has for her and her family.

Related to these approaches, leading development organizations, such as the World Bank (2014), state that it is important to take an economic focus when looking at the consequences of EM. Next to a better understanding of the practice, focusing on the economic consequences can provide arguments in favour of eliminating EM for all parties involved. Parsons et al. (2015) map out the negative economic

consequences of engaging in EM. They conclude that early marriage leads to less participation in the labour force, lower chances of paid work and lower educational attainment, which lead to reduced productivity, earnings and higher sensitivity to economic shocks for early married girls and their families. In addition, early married girls and their families are at higher risk of a bad health, malnutrition and violence within the household, which lead to reduced productivity and higher medical costs. These consequences lead to the perpetuation of a circle of poverty, which can be identified at individual, family, community and national level.

From an economic perspective, the best way to prevent EM is by economically empowering families and communities. Financially empowering a family can take away both the incentives and necessity of engaging in EM (Jain & Kurz, 2007). Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner and Glinksi (2012) conclude, after extensive evaluation of 23 EM prevention programs, that the economic component is too often overlooked and that offering an economic incentive makes programs more effective in fostering change.

However, economic approaches are criticized for being too limited and rational. Authors such as Friedman et al. (1994), Trommsdorff and Nauck (2010) and Bicchieri (2014), argue that many decisions regarding EM are not made solely based on rational economic reasons. Preferences and choices parents make are not purely self-regarding and rational (Bicchieri, 2014). Bicchieri's statement is illustrated by the fact that rational choice arguments do not explain why people in developing countries continue to have children even though the instrumental value of having children is negative (Friedman et al., 1994). By exclusively focusing on the economic factors, this body of theory overlooks important factors that play a role in the decision to engage in EM, such as the sociocultural and religious norms and personal characteristics (Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2010).

### *3.3.3 Rights-Based Approaches*

The notion of rights and rights-based approaches are relatively recent additions to development discourse that evolved during the last three decades in response to changing ideas about development. The ideas regarding development aid arose that (1) Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) did not hold governments of countries sufficiently accountable and (2) that development was not supposed to be exclusively focused on economic support anymore (Uvin, 2007). Because of these new ideas,

(human) rights-based approaches and discourse grew in popularity and in use. Currently, many actors in development such as governments, NGOs and multilateral organisations, use a human rights-based approach or discourse in their work (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). In addition to this development, recognition of the importance of adopting a gender-responsive approach when addressing development challenges has also increased rapidly. In line with this increase, many recent interventions and projects that focus on eliminating EM are based on a rights-based approach and pay particular attention to the notion of gender (ICRW, 2007).

Within both academic literature and international circles, rights-based approaches are defined as approaches that strive to achieve a positive transformation of power relations among the various development actors such as NGOs, the recipients of aid and the government (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). In the case of issues that are deemed to be highly gendered, such as EM, rights-based approaches strive to achieve a change in power relations that redresses gender inequality. Even though, as Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi (2004) argue, different organisations share the same rights-based framework, the ways in which they interpret this broad framework, and the role the approach plays in the work of the organizations is distinctively different. Miedema, Maxwell and Aggleton (2015) suggest drawing a distinction between a formal ‘accountability’ approach in which focus in on the fulfilment of rights, entitlements and obligations on one hand and a more informal approach to rights, that stresses principles of ‘inclusion and empowerment’ on the other hand. This distinction is important to keep in mind when reading about rights-based approaches in this thesis.

Working from a rights-based approach to transform power relations regarding early marriage builds on established international human rights standards (Bunting, 2005), such as the earlier mentioned UDHR (1948), CEDAW (1979) and UNCRC (1989). Generally, the international community wants countries to support these frameworks and to incorporate their principles into national legislation, so that governments can be held accountable and hold others accountable. Concomitantly, the government of Ethiopia included 18 years as the legal age for marriage for both males and females into the national legal framework (FDRE, 1994), based on rejection of early marriage within different rights frameworks that Ethiopia supports. According to Ansell (2005), rights-based interventions often have a strong focus on

Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP). This type of intervention is based on the thought that it is necessary to provide youth and parents with correct knowledge about the rights and health consequences of early marriage to alter their attitudes (ibid.).

Nour (2009) summarizes that rights-based approaches condemn EM as a rights violation because engaging in an EM directly violates girls' rights to education, health, psychological wellbeing and health of offspring. Mutyaba (2011) adds to this that EM also violates the right to dignity, right to freedom from degrading, inhumane and cruel treatment, and right to protection from harmful traditional practices. Rights-based approaches see mandating girls to stay in school until they have finished primary school (age 7-14 in Ethiopia), which has been established as basic right in its self, as one of the most effective methods for reducing EM (Nour, 2009). Even though these approaches are currently popular and widespread in use, different scholars voice points of critique on the application of rights-based approaches and their discourse, which are addressed in the next section.

### *Critiques on Rights-Based Approaches*

The first point of critique contains that the label 'rights-based approach' is often used without the content of a rights-based approach. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) argue that many development actors such as governments, NGOs and multilateral organisations label their strategy as rights-based, without actually using a rights-based approach. According to Uvin (2007), different actors merely build on rights-based approaches to development to claim the moral high ground. He describes this practice as:

*“Draping oneself in the mantle of human rights to cover the fat belly of the development community, avoiding challenging the status quo too much, or questioning oneself or the international system”* (p. 603).

According to Uvin (2007), this lack of questioning and selective application illustrate that power and politics play a dominant role in the development process. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) share this concern by questioning whether rights-based still has any meaning if it does not have the power to transform power relations and is primarily used to exercise power. Hence, critics contend that development actors use rights-based discourse inappropriately, either because it sounds morally just or in order to exercise their power.

Secondly, rights-based approaches are argued to be underpinned by a western-centred point of view and discourse and to not sufficiently respect local traditions (Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Boyden, Pankhurst & Tafere, 2012). According to Rana (2007), for example, rights-based approaches impose a western worldview that leads to a persistence of western psychological colonisation over other parts of the world. He argues that the use of rights-based discourse is directly linked to discursive power, which leads to a “*presence of western cultural hegemony*” (p. 372). Merry (2003) adds to this critique, by stating that western-centred rights-based approaches aim to suppress local culture and are often conceptualised as a struggle against local culture. Rana (2007) argues that, although there are alternatives to this discourse, until now rights-based approaches have remained indifferent towards emerging Third World discourse.

Archambault (2011) voices the third point of critique, namely that using universal rights and gender principles to address local issues can be problematic for adequately addressing these issues. She argues that rights-based approaches are considered to be largely ineffective because the current prevailing use of concepts like ‘tradition’, ‘collective women’s rights’ and ‘victimhood’ in rights-based gender literature on EM deflects attention from effective policy alternatives by ignoring important structural factors that give rise to the practice. Omeje (2001) argues that especially when addressing ‘traditional’ practices, it is important to understand the local historical negotiations, exchanges and expressions that have created and that maintain these practices (Omeje, 2001). Next to this, attention to the realities, experiences and daily lives of girls and women is important in order to be able to understand a complex phenomenon such as EM. Miedema and colleagues (2015) conclude that different forms of rights-based approaches might lack attentiveness to the lived reality of young women’s and men’s lives and the difficulties they may experience in protecting and claiming their rights. For example, programmes building on rights-based approaches might not take into account the difficulty girls have to negotiate their rights in intimate relations or in the family setting. Bunting (2005) adds to this by stating that it is necessary to examine the socio-economic conditions in which girls and young women live in order to come to culturally appropriate international strategies.

In sum, three critiques on rights-based approaches have been voiced. It has been argued that rights-based gender approaches: (1) are often mentioned by organisations because of their discursive power while these organisations do not intend to bear the weight of the intention of the entirety of consequences that flow from it (2) are too western-centric and do not appreciate local culture, and (3) lack effectiveness because they do not take local reality sufficiently into account.

### **3.4 Alternative Approaches and Current Research Model**

As Bicchieri and colleagues (2014) note with regard to the theories explaining EM, different explanations may apply to different regions and to different times. Moreover, early marriage in one specific region at one specific time can have multiple explanations, because there are many factors that influence it. The mainstream theories presented in previous sections are thus better interpreted as partial explanations rather than grand, encompassing theories of EM. This research tries to integrate these western-based mainstream approaches while also borrowing from southern-based alternative approaches such as African feminisms. In Section 3.4.1 the notion of African feminisms is presented. Subsequent to this, the Bronfenbrenner PPCT-Model, in which different approaches are integrated and structured, is introduced (Section 3.4.2). Lastly, this model is adapted into the research model for the current research; this final version is presented in Section 3.4.3.

#### ***3.4.1 African feminisms – Linking Context to Gender***

As stated before, this research is influenced by ideas taken from non-western or, more specifically, African forms of feminism. These forms of feminism heavily criticize western-based mainstream approaches, such as rights-based approaches and traditional western-based feminism. The main points of critique, as summarized by Fennell and Arnot (2008), are that these approaches (1) do not take the local African context sufficiently into account, (2) assume that there is a universal womanhood (3) use western-based discourse, and (4) do not acknowledge the power that African women have through their family ties and relations. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) add to these critiques that application of western gender or feminist theory tends to reduce women in other parts of the world to victim or to ‘other’ (see Textbox 3).

As an alternative to the mainstream approaches toward EM, scholars such as Fennell and Arnot (2008) and Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) propose African feminisms. Arndt (2002) argues that the term ‘feminisms’ has to be used in plural because it is not possible to speak of one form of African feminism, just like it is not possible to generalize all ‘traditional’ feminisms or mainstream approaches into one. Goredema (2010) for example, defines the core of

*“[She i.e. ‘the third world woman’] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.) ... in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.”*

- Mohanty, 1995, p. 96.

### **Textbox 3. The Third World Woman**

African feminisms as a reasoning that has provided arguments that validate the experience of women in Africa against mainstream (feminist) discourse. She sees it as *“a social movement that aims to raise global consciousness, which sympathises with African women’s histories, present realities and future expectations”* (p. 34). Arndt (2002) analysed literature on different African feminisms and came to the conclusion that three categories of African feminism can be identified when considering the way in which the relationship between men and women is conceptualised: reformist, transformative and radical. Reformist African feminism accepts patriarchal orientation of society and tries to offer alternatives. Transformative African feminism sees men not only as accomplices but also as products of the patriarchal system, but assumes that men can be changed. Radical African feminism argues that men per definition mistreat and discriminate women. African feminism’s capacity to adapt itself has enabled different forms of feminisms to get a strong position in all African societies, although in different forms and with different degrees of influence (Arndt, 2002). Arndt (2002) states that the different types of African feminism are quite homogenous in terms of region, social and religious origins of the authors. She mentions that almost all feminists do contribute to transformative literature. Transformative African feminism can therefore be considered the common ground (Arndt, 2002; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). This research uses this conceptualization of transformative African feminism and in that way focuses on the common ground of the different feminisms.

When conducting research, African feminists argue that African female realities should best be researched by African female scholars. Goredema (2010) poses this as:

*“Researchers in fields studying societies, gender studies and feminism are faced with the critical question of what entitles one to be an expert, or to study a subject if you have no legitimate claim to that reality?”* (p. 41)

In subsequent chapter I will return to this argument when discussing my position as a western researcher studying EM in Ethiopia. Furthermore, Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) emphasize that when conducting research, it is important for researchers to be aware of their role as researcher and to try to redefine this role, resisting dominant western-discourses. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) argue that is important to be aware of the biases of the researcher as a person, the use of western-based discourse and methodologies, and the role of the researcher in the western academic system. More specifically, the researcher has to acknowledge her or his background and the biases that stem from this. This research tries to look further than dominant discourses in literature and regards women and girls to be experts in their own lives and environment. The perceptions and ideas of women and girls are therefore leading when considering early marriage. Furthermore, awareness of this bias and positionality of the researcher is explained more extensively in Section 4.2 and 4.4.

### ***3.4.2 Integrating Different Approaches: PPCT-Model***

The Bioecological Model, originally referred to as the Ecological Systems Theory, was first developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 and has since been subject to several modifications and adaptations. The original model highlights the importance of understanding a person’s development within the environmental systems in which the person participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In time, points of critique on the Bioecological Model emerged, voiced by both Bronfenbrenner himself as well as by other scholars (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Principally, these critics argue that the individual is overlooked because the focus of the model is mainly on context. Adapting to these critiques, Bronfenbrenner developed the Bioecological Model into the Process-Person-Context-Time Model, or PPCT-Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The PPCT-Model maintains the focus on context, but additionally emphasizes the role of personal characteristics and proximal processes. The PPCT-Model is based on the interaction of four concepts: Process, Person,

Context and Time. Originally, the Bioecological Model stems from psychology, but currently the PPCT-Model is widely used in disciplines as diverse as family studies, pedagogy and international studies (Tudge et al., 2009).

Tudge and colleagues (2016) evaluated 20 scientific studies that explicitly claimed to use the PPCT-model and came to the conclusion that the vast majority (18) of these studies did not apply PPCT appropriately. Based on this finding Tudge et al. (2016) argue that failure to either correctly describe or to critically test the theory and its central concepts pose significant problems for the future of family studies and gender studies. Anticipating this concern, the key concepts underpinning the PPCT-model are explained below as well as how the model is used to study early marriage. The PPCT-Model is extensively explained in Bronfenbrenner's 1995 article and in Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), these descriptions are used as basis for the overview provided below.

### **Person**

The PPCT-Model acknowledges the role that personal characteristics play in social interactions. Three types of personal characteristics are distinguished: demand characteristics, resource characteristics and force characteristics. *Demand characteristics* such as age or gender set processes in motion. When an Ethiopian girl approaches adolescence the chances of engaging in EM as well as the way she perceives EM may change. *Resource characteristics* include mental resources such as past experiences as well as material resources such as access to housing. For example, whether a girl has access to education or not can influence how she values and regards EM. *Force characteristics* are related to personal variations in motivation and temperament. On this view, when a girl is more temperamental, this may influence how she feels about EM. This study is mainly focused on the personal characteristics of age (demand), gender (demand), marital status (resource) and access to education (resource).

### **Context**

The individual is placed into the different layers of context "*like a Russian doll*" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005 p.22), as shown in Figure 2. The most direct layer surrounding an individual is the *Microsystem*. This contains the direct environments in which the individual regularly interacts. For Ethiopian girls, these environments consist of home

(caregivers and family members), school (teachers), community (peers) and church (religious leaders). How caregivers perceive and approach marriage can influence how girls value early marriage.

The next layer, the *Mesosystem*, consists of the interactions between the different actors and environments that are identified in the Microsystem. What religious leaders preach in church about early marriage can influence how caregivers regard early marriage for their daughters. Further removed from the individual is the *Exosystem*. This system contains indirect

influences on development like caregivers working away from home, local law

enforcement and politics. Within this system falls the influence that mass media can have on the caregivers' and girls' perceptions of EM. The *Macrosystem* is the most outer layer and contains higher-level shared cultural norms, attitudes and ideologies. The influence of the higher-level cultural notion that 'girls do not need to go to school' on how community members perceive EM falls within the scope of this layer. This study focuses mainly on the layers that influence girls most directly; Individual, Microsystem and Mesosystem.

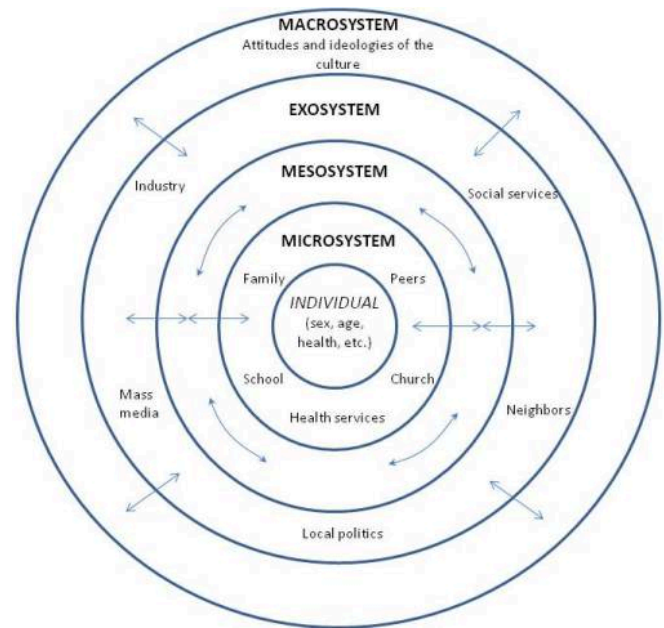


Figure 2. The Different Contextual Layers of the PPCT-Model

## Process

Bronfenbrenner views proximal processes as the basis for shaping individual values. He argues that, proximal processes – or the processes of systematic and regular interaction between an individual and persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment – shape perceptions and values. The nature of the interaction in terms of form, content, power and direction varies per interaction. Systematic interactions of girls with actors in their direct environment (*micro-level*), such as caregivers, peers and teachers, influence the way in which girls perceive early marriage.

## Time

The course of time has an important place within the PPCT-Model and is divided into three categories. *Micro-time* contains a certain interaction or proximal process such as interactions between advocates of different opinions on early marriage during a village meeting. *Meso-time* refers to changes in someone's lifespan like a personal change of opinion on EM when someone grows older. *Macro-time* consists of shifting norms in a wider culture such as changing societal norms on early marriage over generations. For this study, focus is mostly on the first two categories of time because it focuses on how personal ideas about EM change within a relatively short period of time.

### 3.4.3 PPCT Adapted – Conceptual Scheme

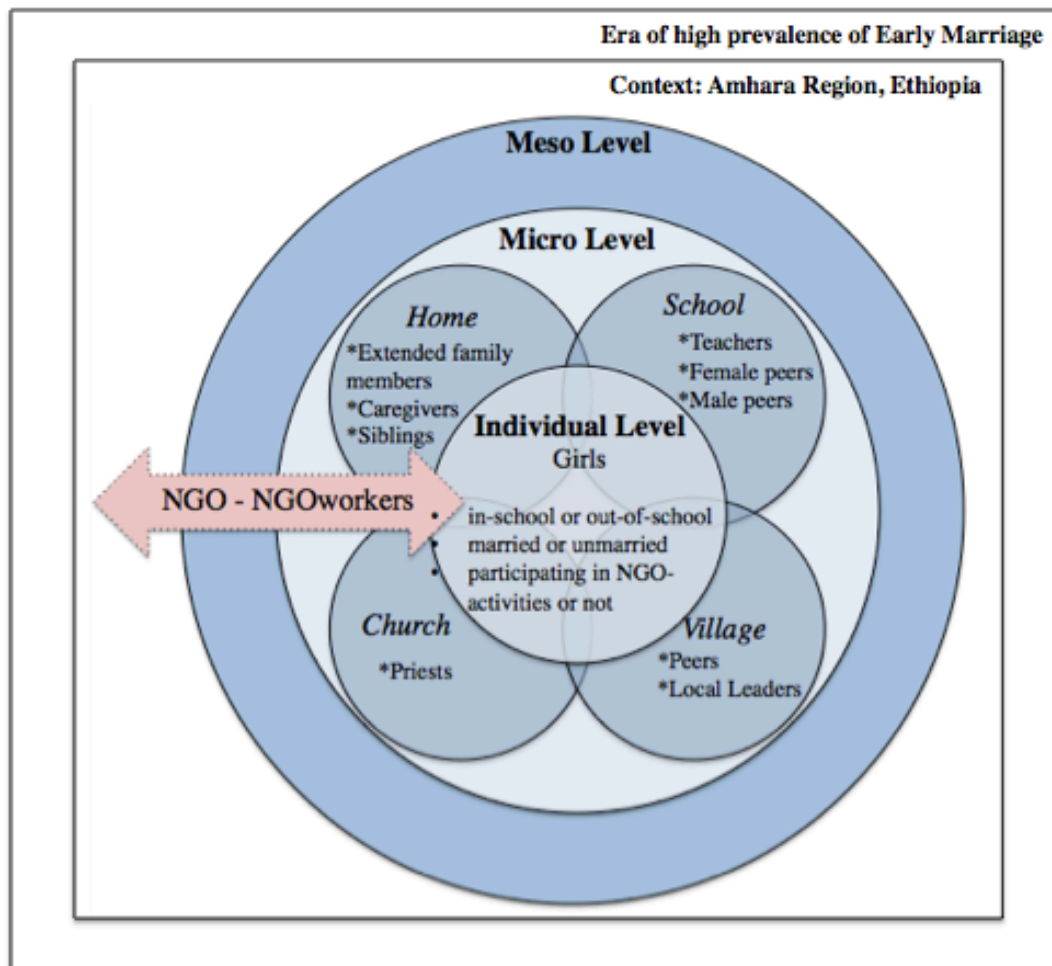


Figure 3. The Conceptual Framework

### **Description of the Figure**

The diagram places the girls and how they value EM in a central position. Firstly, how a girl's personal characteristics influence the way she perceives EM is analysed. More specifically, whether a girl is enrolled in school, whether she participates in EM-related NGO-activities and whether she is married are considered here. The layer (micro-level) surrounding the individual describes the environments (home, school, village and church) in which girls most often interact on a regular basis and the persons they possibly interact with. Decisions on which of these actor groups to include in this layer were made during the research process and fully based on girls' perspectives and statements about whom they interacted with regularly and whose opinions on EM they valued. This layer analyses how girls' perceptions of EM are influenced by interactions within these environments. The broadest layer (meso-level) analyses how the identified actors at micro-level interact and influence each other's perceptions of EM. The arrow in Figure 2 represents local NGOs working on the prevention of EM, because NGOs work through all levels of the model. Since this research is highly context-specific, the figure is placed within local context of Farta Woreda, Ethiopia and within the current period in history.

### **3.5 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter described the theoretical background upon which this research is built. Key concepts underpinning this research have been presented and conceptualised, whereby the use of notions such as HTP and child marriage have been critically regarded for i.e. being western-centric and glossing over local lived realities. Subsequently, 'mainstream approaches' towards early marriage in literature have been displayed and commented on. Furthermore, the chapter has introduced the more 'local-based' approaches of African feminisms, by means of providing an alternative to the mainstream approaches, and has explained the use of the PPCT-model to study EM in the local context whereby people are regarded as experts in their own lives. In the next chapter the research design of this study is presented.

## 4. Research Design

### 4.1 Introduction

Different qualitative methods are combined in this study in order to obtain in-depth knowledge on the local values of early marriage. In this chapter the research design is presented, which forms the essential link between the theoretical framework on the one hand and the results of this study on the other hand. This chapter starts with the fundamental ideas on which the research is based by presenting the questions leading the research and explaining my methodological positioning in terms of epistemological and ontological stance. Consequently, focus is on the practical way in which the research is performed by outlining the combination of research methods, ways of sampling and data analysis that were used. To conclude this section the ethical considerations, research challenges and limitations are discussed.

### 4.2 Research Questions

The objective of this study is to explore the different values that key actors in the community attach to early marriage in Amhara Region in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the study examines how these values are considered by local NGOs in the process of preventing early marriage. The main research question is therefore as follows:

*“How do different key actors value early marriage of girls and young women in Amhara region in Ethiopia and how do local NGOs take into account these local understandings in early marriage prevention efforts?”*

To provide an answer to this research question, five sub-research questions are formulated. These sub questions guided my research and provided the building blocks to answer the main research question.

1. *How do individual level characteristics (such as enrollment in school and marital status) influence the way girls and young women value early marriage?*
2. *How do key actors at micro-level (such as caregivers, religious leaders and teachers) value early marriage?*
3. *How do these key actors appear to influence each other's values of early marriage at meso-level?*
4. *How do local NGO- workers and -activities appear to influence different actors' values of early marriage?*
5. *How do NGOs conceptualize and approach the values of early marriage and take local values of early marriage into account?*

### 4.3 Methodological Positioning

This research is premised on certain assumptions about what knowledge is and how knowledge can and must be obtained. Sumner and Tribe (2008) argue that these assumptions have to be made explicit because they guide the main strategic decisions in this research, such as which theories are incorporated in the theoretical framework and which methods are used for data collection. This idea is displayed in Figure 4, which displays the hierarchy of knowledge elements in the “*scaffold of learning*” (Scotty, 2005; as adapted in Sumner & Tribe, 2008, p. 55).



Figure 4.  
‘Scaffold of Learning’  
(Scotty (2005); as adapted  
in Sumner & Tribe, 2008,  
p. 55)

According to Sumner and Tribe (2008) ontology is best described as a theory or set of assumptions concerning ‘what exists’ and thus ‘what is’. Ontology, thus deals with ‘what the nature of reality is’. Epistemology on the other hand, can best be described as a set of assumptions concerning ‘how we can know’ that which is seen to exist. In other words, epistemology can be considered as dealing with the nature of knowledge itself and with ‘what we can know’.

Starting by explaining my **ontological stance**, which can primarily be defined as social constructivist. I presume that the nature of reality is social and that meaning is constructed socially by and between people. In line with this,

I believe that social reality can never exist independently from the research population and the researcher. This research is aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of people's social behaviour and their reality. Specifically, the socially constructed values and ideas about early marriage are explored, whereby people are regarded as experts in their own realities.

These ontological premises form the basis for my **epistemological stance**, which relates most closely to interpretivism. I assume that people's reality is formed through their own interpretation of reality, which in turn forms the basis for their ideas and behaviour related to EM. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of these ideas and behaviours I focus on interpreting and understanding the meanings of people's social reality.

Consequently, this formed the basis for the **theoretical** choices that were made. A combination of different approaches ranging from (southern) African feminisms to (western) mainstream theories is used, in order to understand the constructed values EM has within the local community and context. The PPCT-Model is employed because it is flexible, can be applied in a culturally sensitive manner and provides structure without being biased.

My ontological and epistemological stance relate closely to the reflexive research **methodology**, as described by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009). They emphasize the importance of being reflexive throughout the entire research process, to be able to critically reflect and constantly be aware of the position of the researcher during the entire research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In line with their reasoning, the methodological approach that I used has been continually reflexive. In the context of early marriage, as highly sensitive topic, I tried to stay aware of the effects of my positionality and of the choices I made with regard to method, data or participation selection.

The emphasis of this research is on qualitative research **methods**. Regarding the complexity and sensitivity of the topic early marriage, using qualitative methods allowed me to approach the topic with more care and flexibility. This approach allowed me to explore participants' perceptions of EM, based on their own experiences and thoughts, instead of imposing my own opinions or thoughts. In order to obtain a deep understanding of these perceptions, mainly open-ended questions were asked to give participants the opportunity to express their views to the fullest.

#### 4.4 Population and Sampling

To provide an answer to the research questions, target groups were identified according to the different levels of the PPCT-Model (individual, micro- and meso-level). As argued, decisions on which of these actor groups to include in my analysis were made during the data collection and fully based on girls' perspectives and statements about whom they interacted with regularly and whose opinions on EM they valued. During the data collection phase, I attempted to reach as many participants as possible from each actor group. Table 1 shows the different actors per level and how many of them participated. In total, 63 interviews and 2 FGDs were conducted.

Table 1  
*Overview of Participants per Actor Group*

Actor group	Interviews	FGDs
1. Girls & 2. Female Peers	20	1
3. Caregivers	14	
4. Primary School Teachers	5	
5. Religious Leaders & Priests	9	
6. Local NGO-workers	4	
7. Others (e.g. Local Leaders)	10	
Total	63	2

This research mainly built on purposive sampling techniques, that is, techniques were applied in the selection of participants that were geared to “*achieve representativeness or comparability*” as described by Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 81). I strove for variation among participants in terms of actor group, personal characteristics (e.g. in-school or out of school), geographic location (NGO-presence and accessibility) and gender (where applicable). This sampling technique enabled me to explore participants' perceptions of EM in the open and broad way that the research question requires. Additionally, this sampling technique made it possible to actively compare different groups with each other, such as married girls with unmarried girls.

Both WCAT and the regional (*woreda*-level) Woman Speaker Office (WSO) played important key roles as ‘gatekeepers’ in reaching the participants by providing access to their local network of key informants. A gatekeeper is described by Jupp (2006) as the person who controls research access or access to the research population. Firstly, together with these two parties, six *kebeles* (villages) were

targeted based on both their diversity in EM-presence and their accessibility. In each *kebele* key informants were contacted and asked to gather or suggest participants from the target groups for the interviews. In addition, participants were selected based on spontaneous encounters if they fitted within the target groups. Table 2 displays the number of participants per *kebele* in order to demonstrate the geographical variation.

Table 2.  
*Geographical Spread of Participants*

Kebele	Interviews	FGDs
Segur Kebele	17	1
Gentenha Kebele	3	
Magendi Kebele	15	
Riyu Aparagay Kebele	2	1
Aringo Kebele	8	
Talda Kebele	2	
Debre Tabor Town	11	
Other	5	
Total	63	2

The first two target-groups (girls and female peers, age 10 to 18) are divided into two groups; in-school girls and out-of-school girls. In-school girls were selected by visiting primary schools and SRH-clubs, whereby the principal of the school was contacted as key informant. Out-of-school girls were selected based on *kebele* visits, where the *kebele* administrator or local women office-worker acted as key informants.

The third target group, caregivers, was reached mainly through spontaneous encounters, *kebele* visits and a *kebele* meeting that I attended. Some of the caregivers volunteered because they wanted to share their opinion or concerns about EM or another topic (see Vignette 1).

During an interview with a local priest a woman (W) runs into the office where the interview was being conducted. The interpreter (I) asked her what was going on and why she ran in.

W: *"I want to be interviewed by the Ferengi! [meaning: Foreigner]"*

I: *"Do you know what the interview is about?"*

W: *"No, but I want to be interviewed by her!"*

I: *"It is about early marriage."*

W: *"Yes, I have been married at 13."*

I: *"Do you also have daughters?"*

W: *"Yes four, and they are married too."*

R: *"OK, let's interview her after this interview."*

- 26 July 2015, Magendi Kebele

#### Vignette 1. Enthusiastic Participants (FN29)

The fourth target group, primary school teachers, was most difficult to reach. Because Ethiopian school holiday started quickly upon the start of the fieldwork period, it became increasingly difficult to get access to teachers. The originally planned number of interviews (ten) was therefore not met for this actor group.

The fifth group, local religious leaders and priests, was reached by visiting several local churches, the regional-level church office and by attending a church service. Most participants in this actor group were willing to participate in the research. However, some priests indicated to feel suspicious about the researchers' possible ties to the police or legal system. Since early marriage is an illegal and sensitive matter in Ethiopia, some participants indicated that they did not feel comfortable being interviewed about EM.

The last actor group, NGO-staff members, was contacted after I asked the regional Woman Speaker Office for an overview of the different NGOs working on early marriage in the region (Farta-woreda). Based on this information, offices of four

NGOs were contacted and visited to ask for an interview with a project officer or other staff-member working on an EM-related project. Three of these organizations have been interviewed.

Overall, people were incredibly nice and interested and often generously offered their help and hospitality. Some participants indicated to feel honoured and grateful to be interviewed and be able to voice their opinion (see Vignette 2).

At the end of an interview with a father (F), the researcher (R) thanked him for his participation.

F: *"No thank you so much for giving me the chance to answer these questions! They tasted like honey in my mouth. I hope you get an airplane!"*

The researcher looked surprised and confused at the interpreter.

F: *"You know, those white things in the sky, there are people in it I heard."*

R: *"Aaah, yes I know what it is!"*

F: *"Do you have one?"*

R: *"No, not yet, but I would like one, thank you so much."*

- 6 July 2015, Segur Kebele

## Vignette 2. Airplane (FN 10)

## 4.5 Evaluation on Methods Used

This section provides a description of the different methods that were used during the course of this research project and explains how they were applied. Furthermore, this section will reflect on the experienced strengths and weaknesses of the methods, and how the different methods were combined in this research.

### 4.5.1 In-Depth Interviews

The method of in-depth interviews was chosen because according to Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) this is the most appropriate way to get to know research participants' "*complete stories and narratives*" (p. 142). As they argue, in an in-depth interview the meanings of the interviewees' stories are developed as the interviewer interprets them. This research builds on Legard and colleagues (2003) who state that an in-depth interview can reproduce a fundamental natural process through which knowledge about the social world is constructed in day-to-day human interaction.

The interviews were conducted in Amharic, the main spoken language in Amhara region. To conduct the interviews, I hired an interpreter – male and working with a local NGO – to translate the questions and responses directly. In this way I could adapt the topics and questions to the responses during the interview itself. However, using an interpreter during interviews brings about some challenges, which are discussed extensively in Section 4.7.3.

In advance, an interview guide for each actor group was constructed, which is provided in Appendix I. During the semi-structured interview, all the topics in the interview guide were touched upon. However, there was flexibility in both the content and the sequencing of topics. If something of interest came up during the interview that was not in the guide but seemed relevant, this topic was also addressed and explored.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked for descriptive data, such as place of residence, age, age of marriage etc. (for an overview of the descriptives, see Appendix II). The interviews were conducted in private, separate spaces to create a safe atmosphere where participants could feel at ease and talk freely. These spaces varied from a church to the office of the *kebele administrator*, and from a room in a school to an open field outside the village. In every context and location, what was felt to be the most appropriate location in terms of participants' privacy and comfort was selected.

### 4.5.2 Focus Group Discussions

The other method that is employed in this research is the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This research builds on Kitzinger (1995), who defines a FGD as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue. This method can provide additional insights to one-on-one interviews, because it does not only involve direct information but also involves group interaction as part of the method. Additionally, Kitzinger (1995) argues, it can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that are less accessible in a one-on-one interview. Wilkinson (1998) adds to this that FGDs make it possible to observe and research participants 'in-context'. Furthermore, FGDs can encourage those too reluctant or shy for an individual interview to contribute, which makes it an especially useful way to investigate cultural values and norms (Kitzinger, 1995).

Because of aforementioned reasons, I planned and conducted FGD in two actor groups. The FGDs were conducted with the same interpreter as the in-depth interviews. The first FGD was conducted with six unmarried girls (10 – 15 years old). These girls seemed reluctant to talk and seemed shy. Unfortunately, this led to very few contributions during the 'discussion'. A principal and a teacher both indicated that they thought girls acted shy during encounters because this is in line with the role they have in Ethiopian society. *"It is more expected [of them] that they keep quiet, this is especially when in groups or class."* (Teacher, Riyu Aparaguay: I20). The second FGD was conducted with five religious leaders (34 – 67 years old). In this FGD only the oldest and most respected leader talked, while the other priests agreed with all his statements and did not contribute themselves. It seemed as if power dynamics and inequality were magnified during the FGD, which is also identified by Millward (2000) as an unintended aspect of FGDs.

It seemed that the participants in both FGDs did not feel comfortable enough to speak openly within the groups. Kitzinger (1995) acknowledges this as a possible problem of the use of FGDs. She states that the privacy of the participants might be invaded when they are asked to talk about sensitive topics with people in their direct environment. Based on reflection of these two cases, I decided to focus more on individual interviews instead of FGDs.

### 4.5.3 Field Notes and Observations

The final method that was used during this research is field notes and observations.

Normally when conducting participant observation, the researcher tries to immerse him- or herself in the local culture to fully understand the research context (Bryman, 2008). However, in this research it was sometimes difficult to become completely immersed in the local community given that I could not really blend in with ‘the locals’ (see Vignette 3). Many people were surprised or intrigued by seeing a *Ferengi* (white person or foreigner) in their own village. As soon as local people saw me approaching, they stopped what they were doing and started staring at me. In

“You! You! You!”  
“Hey white people!”  
“Ferengi! Ferengi!”

The entire day, everywhere I go people keep staring, pointing and yelling at me. Although this is out of interest and surprise, this makes it difficult or even impossible to fully participate or covertly observe day-to-day life in the community. Every moment of the day the entire village is aware of where “the *Ferengis*” are and what we are doing.

- 14 July 2015, Debre Tabor

addition, the language barrier and necessity of **Vignette 3. Ferengi! Ferengi! (FN18)** using an interpreter made casual conversations and spontaneous encounters more difficult. Because of this, the main source of observation and notes are the more general observations of daily life, whereby special attention was given to the role, appearance and body language of girls and young women and their interaction with other actor groups. In addition to this, I kept a fieldwork diary with notes about every day and about every research situation encountered. Furthermore, I wrote down specific comments and remarks on every interview and every participant. For an overview of these notes, see Appendix III.

### 4.5.4 Combining Methods

My initial plan was to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. However, following discussions with local NGO-workers of WCAT about the feasibility of implementing a quantitative survey in the research area, I decided to solely focus on a mix of different qualitative methods.

Using qualitative methods provides more in-depth knowledge and allows more flexibility, according to Bryman (2008). Furthermore, as argued by Wilson and Hutchinson (1991), it is necessary to use multiple qualitative research methods in order to be able to understand complex human phenomena. These methods were

combined and triangulated with each other as ‘pieces of the puzzle’ to create in-depth knowledge on the local values attached to EM.

## 4.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis is based on transcriptions, field notes and voice recordings. The majority of the in-depth interviews and all the FGDs were recorded with a voice recorder (Philips DVT4000). The audio recordings – containing the interpretations – were transcribed in English ad verbatim as soon as possible and subsequently entered and coded in the analysis-program NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2014). Notes made during unrecorded interviews, observations and field notes were typed out on the same day and categorized per date. In the field all obtained data was

*“Open coding is the first step in coding, which aims at expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts. ... Axial coding is the second step in coding, to refine and differentiate the categories resulting from open coding.”*

- Flick, 2014, p. 315

### Textbox 4. Coding

organized and stored on the researchers password protected computer. Several backups were made on a separately stored external hard disk (Seagate Backup Plus). During the data collection phase, an extensive Excel-file with information on the research activities, participants and additional comments was maintained. A cleaned up version of this file is included in Appendix IV. To analyse the data generated during interviews and FGDs a combination of open and axial coding was applied, which, according to Boeije (2010), helps to categorize the gathered data around the themes relevant to the posed research questions.

## 4.7 Ethical Considerations, Research Challenges and Limitations

### 4.7.1 Ethical Considerations

This paragraph reflects on which particular ethical considerations were most important to this research. Trust is the first issue that had a substantial impact on this research because the research engages with an extremely sensitive and controversial topic. As Legard and colleagues (2003) note, when using in-depth interviews and FGDs on sensitive topics, it is of great importance to establish a good working relationship with the participant. To establish trust, it is important to put the participant at ease and to create a climate of trust (Legard et al., 2003). To reach this

climate, I tried to continually keep an open and unbiased attitude, to express genuine interest and to break the ice. In general, this climate of trust seemed to be present in the majority of the interviews. When I had the feeling that the 'climate of trust' could not be established, I noted this down in the field notes and considered it during data analysis.

In this research I tried to inform the participants in an as complete and as open manner possible on what they could expect from the interview, as to not deceive the participants or create false expectations. Before each interview, time was taken to explain the goal of the research, the intended use of research outcomes and the role of the researcher and interpreter. Building on Bryman (2008), an effort was made to inform the participants adequately about their role and participation in my research. Additionally, all participants were asked for their verbal consent to being interviewed, before the start of each interview. In addition to the general consent, participants were asked for their permission to record the interview on the voice recorder. Not all participants gave permission for their interview to be recorded. In cases where permission was not acquired, I made extensive notes of all the information and nonverbal communication.

Furthermore, the issue of anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was considered. At the beginning of the interview each participant was notified of the fact that the interviews would be processed anonymously and that their responses would not be shared with other participants. The names of the participants were not asked for so that the data of the interviews could be processed completely anonymous and confidentiality could be assured. In this thesis, references to specific interviews and persons are made by using a fictitious respondent name in combination with the actual interview number (name, relevant characteristic: number). Additionally, it was emphasized that the participant could stop at any time during the interview and that in that case the already obtained information would not be used at all. In that way the participants' privacy was protected and guaranteed.

Finally, as Bryman (2008) notes, it is important to adjust the content of the interview to the local realities in order to not ask inappropriate questions or mislead the participants. The content of the interview guide was checked with the interpreter and the local WCAT office to verify whether the questions were appropriate both in terms of content as in formulation. In according to this, inappropriate or irrelevant questions were changed before starting the interviews and FGDs. The final research

results and report will not be communicated to the participants themselves directly for practical and ethical reasons (confidentiality) but rather the results will be communicated with the NGOs (i.e., SKN, WCAT, and DEC) that facilitated this research and have early marriage programs in the research area. In this way, the results can possibly provide insight into local meanings of EM and influence the NGOs intervention strategies. Hopefully, the participants can benefit in an indirect way through improved prevention programs.

#### *4.7.2 Reflections on the Research Process*

This section engages with three reflections on how the research process developed. First of all, due to the limited timeframe and qualitative character of the study the findings cannot be generalized to other areas or to the entire country. The research should be regarded as an exploratory study of local perceptions and values attached to early marriage. The timeframe of ten weeks in the field proved to be even shorter than expected, because a lot of waiting time was not accounted for in my original (over) ambitious planning. For example, once in the field I often had to wait for a couple of days because people did not respond, were unavailable or unreachable. In addition, the interpreter was part-time available besides his job at the organization, which asked for creative time management and led to some delay. It proved to be hard to reach the originally planned amount of participants (100). In retrospect, I am very content with the amount and quality of the interviews that I managed to conduct within this timeframe.

Furthermore, the accessibility of the research area proved to be more difficult than expected. During the fieldwork period it was rainy season in Ethiopia, which resulted in muddy, impassable roads and isolated *kebeles*. In order to reach the more remote *kebeles*, which were of most interest due to their high prevalence of EM, we had to go by car. However, in our town there were only a handful of cars, mostly possessed by government offices. Every time we wanted to visit a remote *kebele*, we had to go door-by-door around town to borrow a car. The offices did not allow us to drive on the dangerous roads by ourselves, so we had to hire a driver as well. Given the car, the driver, the local WSO-official and *kebele* administrator all had to be available at the same time, visiting a remote *kebele* became a real planned expedition trip. Even when we did manage to arrange a ‘research day’, this day was often limited to a couple of hours in the *kebele* since we had to leave before 2 pm in the afternoon

because of the rain. Apart from these experiences being incredibly valuable and providing insights, they also slowed down my research enormously and made it more expensive than I expected.

The third point of reflection is concerned with the attitude of local people towards the researcher and the research. In advance I did not expect how uncommon my presence and the research would be in remote *kebeles*. Sometimes people were already waiting for a long time for us to arrive, standing in lines, in order to be interviewed. Unfortunately, we could not interview everyone due to the limited timeframe. Another possible drawback of this was that sometimes people kept on walking in or hanging around near the interview space in order to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside. Since this could possibly affect the participants' privacy, the interpreter asked these people to keep their distance. Sometimes, for example in the case of priests, it was more complicated to get them to leave due to the high status they possess within the local community. In these situations, I made notes of when external events might have influenced the responses.

#### *4.7.3 Limitations*

This section discusses three limitations that are important to keep in mind when reading or using the results of this research. The first limitation of this research has to do with the *positionality* of the researcher. Positionality is the idea that gender, race, class and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities (Alcoff (1988), as described in Maher & Tetreault, 1993). The fact that I am a relatively young, white female of Dutch descent has to be considered in this respect. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) argue that these identity markers might have influenced the participants to respond in a different way. More specifically, as Legard and colleagues (2003) describe, feminist approaches to in-depth interviewing state that someone should always be interviewed by an interviewer of the same gender and ethnic background in order to reach the appropriate climate of trust. This point is also voiced extensively in African feminist literature by among others Goredema (2010), who states that 'not-African' researchers are not entitled to conduct research in Africa as they are part of the biased western system. On the other hand, Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) argue that the 'western' researcher can conduct the research, if she acknowledges her own background and the biases that stem from it. This is the point

of view I follow by continuously staying aware of the western-based worldview I have and of my role within the western academic system.

Secondly, working with a language barrier is one of the main limitations of this research. Because I do not speak the local language, all the interviews were conducted with an interpreter. Fersch (2013) argues that a consequence of translating content can be that valuable information in language is lost. The use of language or the use of

certain words in a language might simply not be

After several interviews with school-aged girls, I started to notice that the first interview question; *“What do you think about marriage?”* was often responded to with an answer specifically focused on the consequences of early marriage. I decided to address this issue with the interpreter:

R: *“Did you ask them about early marriage or marriage in general?”*

I: *“I told them specifically: so I am talking about marriage in general and not about early marriage.”*

R: *“Maybe we can not mention early marriage at all in the first question?”*

I: *“Yes”*

Unfortunately, the answers remained the same...

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transferable to English or might have subtle differences in meaning that do not exist in English (ibid.). Additionally, the researcher can never be exactly sure of how a question was asked literally because of this extra link. Even though all the interview questions and the ideas behind them were discussed extensively with the interpreter in advance, it has to be acknowledged that sometimes there might have been a difference between the intended question and the actual posed question. An illustration of this difference is provided in Vignette 4.

Given EM is a sensitive and gendered topic, the fact that the interpreter was a male and

### Vignette 3. Lost in Translation? (FN22)

employed by WCAT, might have been of influence on the participants' responses. However, the interpreter was highly experienced working with girls and other community members on the prevention of EM, which seemed to have compensated amply. Overall, the participants seemed to be very comfortable and friendly with the interpreter.

The third limitation of my study relates to the fact that in the research there was cooperation with a local NGO operating in the area, WCAT. This cooperation might have influenced the results in two ways. On one hand, people that knew WCAT might have responded in a more socially desirable way. More specifically, people might have denied the presence of EM after the project and exaggerated the effect of the implemented project in order to be polite or nice towards the WCAT-worker. On

the other hand, the presence of this local NGO-worker might have led people to exaggerate the situation regarding EM in a negative way in order to get a project or funds for their *kebele*. Since this possible bias works in two directions, it is not possible to get a clear idea of the extent to which NGO-presence influenced the responses. To mitigate this, a clear explanation of the independence of the researcher and interpreter was provided during every interview or FGD. Because there was suspicion of socially desirable answering, this topic is integrated extensively in the results of this study and discussed in Section 8.3.

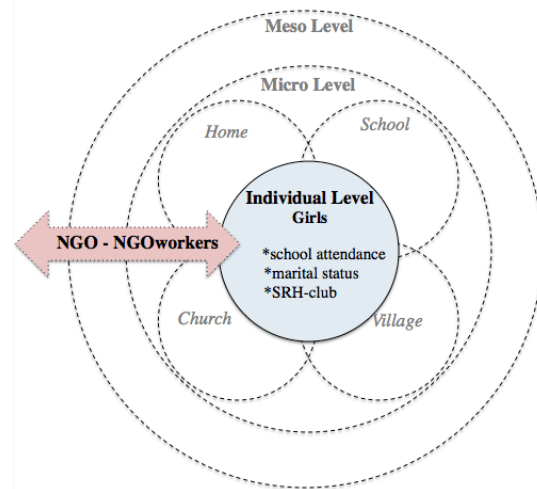
#### 4.8 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I presented my research questions that are central to this research and I extensively explained my methodological position. Furthermore, the chapter sheds light on and evaluates how the different qualitative methods (i.e. in-depth interviews, FGDs and field notes) have been used and how data has been processed and analysed. The chapter concludes with an overview of some important ethical considerations, reflections on the research process and limitations of my study. The next chapters (Chapter five and six) present the most important empirical findings of this study and focus on how girls and other key actors in the local community value early marriage.

## 5. Values of Early Marriage: the Individual Level

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how girls regard and value early marriage at the individual level. The data collected in the field is analysed and presented in order to provide an answer to the following sub research questions:



*“How do girls and young women value early marriage?”*

*“What are the differences between girls and young women based on individual level characteristics such as school attendance and marital status?”*

*“How do NGOs take the values girls attach to early marriage into account?”*

In line with Bronfenbrenner (1995), several individual-level characteristics that play a role in shaping how girls value early marriage have been identified. In addition to basic characteristics such as age and gender -- which are considered *demand characteristics* -- three *resource characteristics* came forward during the research. These characteristics include whether a girl is attending school, whether she is married and whether she is participating in EM-focused NGO-activities (see Table 3). Section 5.2 and 5.3 explain how respectively, school enrolment and marital status shape the individual level context and values of girls. How girls’ values are linked to NGOs and NGO-activities is discussed in Section 5.4. Lastly, Section 5.5 provides an overview of the key points presented in this chapter.

Table 3

*Resource Characteristics of the Interviewed Girls (N = 20)*

	In school	Out of school	Total
<b>Married</b>	1	7	8
<b>Unmarried</b>	11	1	12
<b>Total</b>	12	8	20

## 5.2 Differences in Values Between In- and Out-of-School Girls

In general, girls' school enrolment in Farta Woreda is low - just like in the rest of Amhara – with large variations between *kebeles*. During the interviews, three main reasons for the lack of enrolment among girls came forward. Kidist (14, out-of-school: I18) described the first reason as: *“For my parents it is not possible to let me go [to school], because they are not able to pay for all of us”*. This reason overlaps with arguments made by Bicchieri (2014) about choosing to take girls out of school because of limited financial resources and Tilson and Larson (2000) who emphasize the lower economic value schooling potentially has for girls in comparison to boys. Another reported reason (named by three girls) is the care function that children have in Ethiopian society, as illustrated by Nishan (16, out-of-school: I4); *“I am the last one, so I have to take care of my parents, my parents are old.... My sisters before me could go”*. This corresponds with what Friedman and colleagues (1994) describe as the value children can have for parents in old age. Thirdly, and most prevalent (named by 8 girls), it came forward that for girls there is a strong link between getting married and dropping out of school, which is acknowledged broadly in literature (Tilson & Larson, 2000; Emirie, 2005). A local WSO-official (33, Debre Tabor: I11) confirmed this link: *“Unfortunately, engaging in marriage at an early age almost always leads to dropping out of school here.”* Because of this strong relation, 12 in-school girls and 8 out-of-school girls have been interviewed and compared.

In general, when girls were asked how they felt about early marriage, girls in both groups indicated to regard and value early marriage in a negative way and to reject the practice. However, the explanation for this rejection seems to differ greatly in both groups of girls. Many in-school girls described EM as a ‘HTP’, as ‘illegal’ and ‘unhealthy’, using elaborate answers focused on legal and health terminology. An example of such an answer is provided in Vignette 5. The references to many direct health consequences, such as

R: *“What do you think about EM?”*

P: *“It is a harmful traditional practice. It is dangerous before 18 because it has different consequences like fistula, diseases and stress. .... Also it leads to stigma and high medical costs. There are physical and economic consequences, for the girl and the community. It is also bad for society because the girl can not contribute and remains poor.”*

Emebet (13), in-school: I2

### Vignette 5. Elaborate Answers

fistula, suggested that girls had received specific information about EM either in class or in SRH-club. However, as I noted in my research journal at the time of data

collection: *“The responses of the in-school girls to this question seem rather studied and sometimes sound like they think I am testing their knowledge instead of asking their opinion.”* (FN7). The reasons why girls may have provided particular responses might be attributed to my positionality as a western researcher or to the fact that I worked with WCAT.

In-school girls seemed to perceive early marriage as remote, rare and mostly not directly related to themselves. In contrast, out-of-school girls tended to perceive EM in a more negative emotional way. They regarded EM as ‘bad’, ‘threatening’ and ‘scary’. Nishan (16, out-of-school: I4) for example stated: *“It’s bad.... I don’t want it because you remain poor”*. Nishan confirms that out-of-school girls regard married life as a burden, which they associated with poverty and having no future. Out-of-school girls seemed to consider marriage more inevitable and related it more directly to them. These differences in language, emotion and perspective between the two groups is indicative of the influence school enrolment appears to have on the extent to which girls consider EM to be a threat to them.

In addition, both groups of girls observed a difference between girls in school

Researcher: *“Do you feel there is a difference [in the ability to prevent a marriage] between girls in school and out of school?”*

Adina (17, out-of-school: I26): *“The students in school have power to say no. They have a chance to report the case to the teachers or the police. A girl who doesn’t go to school doesn’t know where to go.”*

Aster (13, out-of-school: I44): *“I would have had no chance because they will throw me out of the house.”*

and out-of-school with regard to the ability to refuse EM (see Vignette 6). Girls that are in school are regarded as ‘safer’ because they can anonymously report a potential EM in the Suggestion Box at school or notify the teacher and principle, which in turn can talk to the *kebele* administrator and caregivers. In-school girls indicated they felt secure that they could stop a marriage if there would be one. Berhane (14, in-school: I27) even described how she managed to

#### **Vignette 6. The Power to Say No**

stop her own potential marriage from happening by informing the teacher and principal of the school about it.

*“They tried to do it ... But I knew what to do ... They [teacher and principal of the school] went to my parents and got angry with them. My parents agreed to keep me in school and now I told other girls about my case so that they can also stand up if it happens to another girl.”*

Berhane described an example of a successful intervention of the existing prevention system that is provided through SRH-clubs and the formal education system. In contrast to this statement, out-of-school girls reported to have less access to these prevention systems and to have no alternative options than to agree to the EM.

When asked about what they consider main reasons for people to engage in the practice of EM, in-school girls mainly attributed it to lack of knowledge. Many in-school girls (e.g. I2, I3, I13) stated that: *“They are not aware.”* These girls seemed to assume that obtaining knowledge about the consequences of EM automatically leads to rejection of the practice. This idea corresponds to KAP-approaches, as explained by Ansell (2005), which emphasize a linear relationship between knowledge and changed attitudes and hence, practices. Contrastingly, out-of-school girls mainly emphasized economic reasons for engaging in early marriage. Hanna (14, out-of-school: I43) illustrated this as follows: *“The parents of my husband are very rich. They even have a mill. ... because they are so rich it was important to establish relations with them.”* Hanna’s quote links to Parsons and colleagues’ (2015) argument about the higher economic value girls can have for their family when they are married than unmarried.

All girls in both groups mentioned 18 years as the appropriate age for marriage, some giving higher ages. In and out-of-school girls seemed to be very aware of the legal age for marriage, in contrast to what scholars such as Emirie (2005) and Gage (2013) report. Interestingly, in-school girls argued that the minimum age for marriage had to be 18 years, because before that age girls are not physically and emotionally mature enough for marriage and childbearing. *“They should marry after they are grown physically mature, 18.”* (Berhane, 14, in-school: I27) Some out-of-school girls indicated that they did not know why 18 is the right age, other than because it is ‘right’. Other out-of-school girls emphasized economic reasons as explanation for the minimum age of 18 that they mentioned. *“I will marry when I am economically strong so that I can be independent, when I am 18 or higher.”* (Nishan, 16, out-of-school: I4). With this quote Nishan emphasizes the importance of both obtaining a better economic position and of gaining her (economic) independence.

Noteworthy is that when girls were asked about the prevalence of EM in their *kebele*, all girls reported that there were (almost) no cases present. An example of this is Lela (14, in-school: I7), who stated: *“I am not aware ... before there were many,*

*now I do not know any*". These accounts are inconsistent with available data on prevalence rates, my research diary notes, and WSO data. A possible explanation for this inconsistency can be that girls do not feel comfortable discussing EM with myself as researcher or with an NGO-worker as interpreter.

Table 4

*Differences Between In- and Out-of-School Girls*

	<b>In-school girls</b>	<b>Out-of-school girls</b>
<b>Value &amp; perception of EM</b>	Negative Legal & health discourse Not linked to themselves	Negative Feelings based Linked to themselves
<b>Reasons for getting married</b>	"Lack of awareness" Rights-based approaches	"Economic reasons" Economic approaches
<b>Ability to refuse EM</b>	Secure, network & suggestion box, easily accessible network	Insecure, scared, prevention not accessible
<b>Ideal age for marriage</b>	18, because of physical maturity	18, not sure or because of economic independence
<b>Influenced by</b>	Peers, teachers, caregivers & religious leaders, SRH club	Caregivers & religious leaders

### 5.3 Differences in Values Between Married and Unmarried Girls

In this section the difference between married ( $N = 8$ ) and unmarried ( $N = 12$ ) girls is explored. It has to be noted that – as displayed in Table 3 (p.50) – seven of the eight girls who were out of school, were married. Because of this overlap between the groups of out-of-school girls and married girls, this paragraph additionally focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of the apparent differences in values of EM between in- and out-of-school girls.

In order to understand the impact of getting married on girls' perceptions and values of early marriage, girls were asked how they felt about marriage before their marriage and how this has changed since they got married. Seven girls indicated to feel negative about early marriage before getting married. Because of this, many of the married girls indicated that they felt very emotional once they learned they had to get married. *"I don't remember everything but I remember when my mother told me*

*about my marriage I started to scream and cry... I was scared.”* Told Adina (17, married: I26). Hanna (14, married: I43) described this as follows: *“I was angry but my parents convinced me that it was something good.”* Just like Adina and Hanna, all eight married girls indicated that they felt angry, scared and desperate when they learned they had to get married. For all but one girl this negative feeling did not change over time. Even though they accepted their new lives, married girls felt worse off than they could have been if they were unmarried and than their currently unmarried counterparts.

When asked for the differences between married and unmarried girls, many girls named differences in appearance and future opportunities. Aster (13, married: I44) described these differences as follows:

*“Girls who are not married go to school and are able to read and write and we are not. And they are clean. They wash their clothes, we work. We don't have time to take care of ourselves.”*

Most of the girls agreed with this and argued that unmarried girls look cleaner and healthier. This appearance was often linked to the economic position of unmarried girls. Berhane (14, married: I27): *“They are poorer and thinner.”* Berhane’s statement corresponds to Parsons et al. (2015) who concluded that early marriage can lead to reduced earnings and more economic vulnerability for both girls and their (future) families. Kidist (14, married: I18) confirmed this in Vignette 7.

Besides this difference in appearance and current economic situation, girls observed a difference in life prospects and dreams between married and unmarried girls. Married girls indicated that their future perspective was more limited. They felt as if they could not live up to their dreams anymore because of the marriage. *“I wanted to become a doctor. This was my dream... Now I can not become a doctor anymore.”* said Hanna (14, married: I43). Hanna’s statement is an illustration of the fact that girls clearly blamed early marriage for depriving them of the opportunity to pursue their dreams. This is further illustrated by Ruth (15, married: I45):

R: How would you describe your life now?

After a long silence, the girl looks up from the floor:

P: *“We are eating mud”*

R: What does that mean?

Interpreter: It is an expression for living in great poverty and not having enough to eat.

We offer her something to drink and some cookies. She takes many.

- Kidist (14, married, I18)

#### Vignette 7. Eating Mud

*“I married when I was 10 and dropped out of school. If I were to marry when I was 18, I could have completed my education and earn my own money”.*

Most of the in and out-of-school girls agreed with Ruth that it would not be possible to continue their schooling after being married. *“They do not let you go [to school] anymore. They want you to work for the family and fulfil your duties as a wife.”* (Emebet, 13, unmarried: I2). In Emebet’s statement ‘they’ refers to the potential husband and his family. Three girls reported that husbands and their family often do not accept married girls to attend school because this is inappropriate and because they want girls to work for their families. This lack of acceptance corresponds to Sultana (2010), who argues that social norms about masculinity and femininity can lead to pressure on young women to fulfil tasks related to their reproductive role and to drop out of school. Furthermore, some girls adapted their aspirations and wanted to move away from their village in order to find work in the town or in a larger city. Adina (17, married: I26), for example, stated: *“First it was my dream to complete my education and become someone ... now it is my dream to move away to town.”* In comparison to married girls, such as Adina, unmarried (and in-school) girls still held on to their dreams.

During the interviews unmarried and in-school girls appeared very different from their married counterparts in terms of verbal style and non-verbal communication.

*“Married girls seemed more silent, gave shorter responses, and were staring at the floor. Some questions were difficult for them to answer and had to be skipped. In contrast, the unmarried girls talked relatively more easily, gave longer responses and appeared less shy and more confident”* (FN 11).

A Women & Children Office-worker confirmed this observation and gave as explanation: *“Girls that are married are sometimes more stressed or even traumatized. They are not used to expressing their opinions in this way.”* (WSO-worker, 33: I11). This explanation corresponds to both the link that Raj (2010) found between getting married early and experiencing trauma, depression and other mental health problems and to Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003) who argue that engaging in marriage or giving birth at a very young age can lead to a more unequal relation between both spouses and sometimes even to higher chances of GBV. These consequences may lead to a more timid, unresponsive and closed attitude among married girls, as was observed.

Table 5

*Differences Between Married and Unmarried Girls*

	Unmarried girls	Married girls
<b>Value &amp; perception of EM</b>	Scared Official discourse	Sad, hopeless, Feelings based
<b>Reasons for getting married</b>	-	Forced by parents, later informed
<b>Differences</b>	Healthy physical appearance	Weaker physical appearance, Poor
<b>Future perspective</b>	Positive “I want to become a doctor”	Negative “My dreams are gone”
<b>Appearance in research</b>	Confident, elaborate responses	Silent, short responses

## 5.4 Girls' Values and NGOs

This section looks at the links between how girls' value and perceive early marriage, as described in the last sections, and NGO prevention activities. Local WSO-office worker Debora (33, female: I11) reported that three NGOs were working on the prevention of early marriage in Farta Woreda at the time of this research. The main focus in this thesis is on WCAT because this is the organization that I worked with most closely, from which I was able to gain most data and therefore the organization I could obtain the most complete picture of. Data gathered on the other two active NGOs (Chadith and Care International) are used as frame of reference.

WCAT is a locally based NGO that describes itself as a “*Legally Registered, Child Focused Indigenous Humanitarian Organization*” (WCAT, 2015: Document 4). In contrast with the other two NGOs that I engaged with during this research, WCAT was not part of an international alliance but had its own strategy and was thereby financially supported by foreign donor organisations (such as Stichting Kinderpostzegels). WCAT ran two active projects focused on prevention of early marriage in Farta Woreda, which were interrelated and primarily shared target population, activities, information channels and implementation area (*kebeles*). More concretely, WCAT was active in six *kebeles* in this *woreda* and directly targeted 600 in- and out-of-school girls, 1500 girls in primary school girls and 500 girls and young

women in secondary school in both projects together (WCAT, 2015: Document 4 and 5).

The way in which WCAT aimed to reach these targeted girls was by establishing and promoting SRH-clubs (Sexual Reproductive Health-clubs). Tsegay (45, male NGO-worker: I48) described an SRH-club as: *“A club wherein girls can voluntarily come together and discuss and learn about important SRH-topics.”* Girls that are part of the SRH-club come together on a weekly basis during the school year in a special classroom to discuss SRH-related topics like contraception, menstruation and early marriage (reports from SRH-club members Emebet (15, in-school: I2) and Berhane (14, in-school: I27)). A specially trained teacher functions as the ‘*SRH- Club Leader*’ and as such fulfils the roles of practical leader, source of information and first point of contact for the girls. As school principal Habtamu (35, male: I12) mentioned:

*“In addition to providing the girls with this information, the SRH-club also functions as a concrete safety net. If there is a suspicion of marriage, girls can go to their club leader.”*

These two functions Habtamu mentioned, correspond strongly with what (SRH-club-attending) girls experienced as the two strong advantages of SRH-clubs as a prevention method (I13 and I15).

It is important to note that because SRH-clubs were facilitated by primary schools, it was mainly in-school girls who participated in the clubs. All interviewed girls that participated in SRH-clubs (nine girls) attended the primary school that facilitated the SRH-club. Even though out-of-school girls were very welcome, it seemed as if the link between SRH-clubs and formal schooling kept out-of-school girls from participating (FN21). This finding corresponds with reports of out-of-school girls such as Adina (17: I26) and Aster (13: I44), who indicated that they lacked access to this source of knowledge and prevention system.

With regard to the ways in which the three NGOs conceptualised early marriage, both their EM-related policy documents and website information stated goals such as *“improving the socioeconomic position of girls”* (WCAT, 2015: Document 4) and *“improving the sexual reproductive health of girls and young women”* (CARE International, 2015: Document 7). Central means to reach these goals included ‘increasing educational participation’, ‘creating awareness about harmful traditional practices’ and ‘providing knowledge about sexual reproductive

health'. WCAT appeared to conceptualise EM as a (sexual and reproductive) health issue and as a practice that stems from tradition and culture, and as indicative of a lack of knowledge. More specifically, early marriage was considered to be a HTP, a term that is much-used in the context of Ethiopia. In contrast with the other two NGOs, WCAT conceptualised EM most literally as a HTP, as explained by Tsegay (45, male: I48):

*“Yes, we see it as a harmful traditional practice that is bad for the health of girls, just like our government.”*

As Tsegay – a staff member of WCAT – stated, the main focus of the projects was to *“provid[e] knowledge about EM and its harmful consequences”* (Tsegay, 45, male, I48) because early marriage was regarded as an obstacle for both girls' sexual reproductive health and their (formal) educational participation.

Furthermore, these conceptualizations of early marriage correspond strongly to reports from girls that were attending SRH-club. The remark that I made earlier on about the apparently *“studied responses”* (FN7) of in-school girls, seemed to be even stronger for SRH-club members. Many girls that were in SRH-club could literally repeat all the definitions and lists of adverse consequences of early marriage that they had learned. Furthermore, girls (and teachers) acknowledged SRH-club as one of their most valued sources of information on early marriage (e.g. I3, I16 and I27) and appeared to strongly internalize the conceptualizations of early marriage that they learnt in SRH-club.

## 5.5 Concluding Remarks

At the individual level all girls indicated to value early marriage in a negative way. Important differences came forward when further exploring their perceptions along the lines of resource characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) such as marital status and school enrolment. The strong link between dropping out of school and early marriage as well as the higher prevalence of early marriage among out-of-school girls, both broadly acknowledged in literature (among others Tilson & Larson, 2000; Emirie, 2005), was confirmed.

In-school girls appeared to regard early marriage differently than out-of-school girls. In-school girls conceptualised early marriage mainly as a health problem, a Harmful Traditional Practice and to be a result of a lack of knowledge. Out-of-school girls perceived EM in a more emotional way and experienced EM as a threat

and an economic burden. The difference in conceptualisation of EM between both groups may be attributed to the difference in prevalence and in access to the prevention system between both groups of girls. That is, because out-of-school girls seemed to feel more at risk of early marriage, they seemed to perceive EM in a more emotional way than in-school girls. Furthermore, in-school girls focused on negative rational, health and on knowledge aspects of EM. Out-of-school girls merely related to the negative economic aspects of EM and as such might be seen to relate more to principles underpinning economic approaches (Parsons et al., 2015).

Although the groups of unmarried and married girls partially overlapped with the groups of in- and out-of-school girls, additional differences between married and unmarried girls did come forward in primarily physical appearance, economic position and future dreams. Married girls continued to value EM negatively after marriage, considering their marriage as limiting their current and future situation. A large difference in nonverbal communication and physical appearance between both groups of girls was observed during the course of data collection, which may be explained by higher levels of mental distress experienced by married girls.

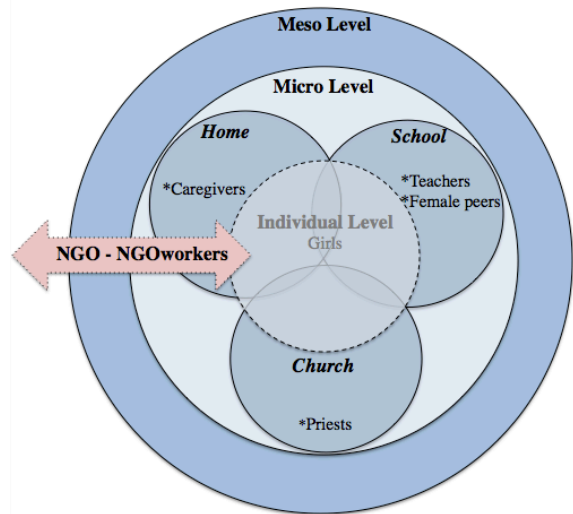
Many girls denied the prevalence of EM in their community hereby contradicting observations and official numbers. A possible explanation for this can be that my *positionality*, as originally coined by Alcoff (1988), played a restrictive role. These limitations that come with being a western researcher in African context correspond to what African feminists such as Goredema (2010) and Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) state about the role of the western researcher.

The local NGO mainly worked on the prevention of early marriage through SRH-clubs. Consequently, the main target group of the NGO was in- and out-of-school girls and young women. However, drawing on the data it could be concluded that SRH-clubs mainly reached in-school girls, since SRH-clubs were provided through the formal education system and facilitated by primary schools. Girls who participated in SRH-clubs appeared to highly value this source of information and adopt NGO understandings as to the health risks posed by early marriage, the practice of EM being a harmful traditional practice and the result of a lack of knowledge. In other words, girls' internalisation of the conceptualisations of early marriage as presented to them in SRH-club seemed to have strongly influenced girls' understandings of early marriage.

## 6. Values of Early Marriage: the Micro- and Mesolevel

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how important actors, as identified by girls, value early marriage at the micro- and mesolevel. The data collected in the field is analysed and presented in order to provide an answer to the following sub research questions:



*“How do actors at microsystem-level value early marriage?”*

*“How do actors at microsystem-level influence girls’ values of early marriage?”*

*“How do the different actors influence each other with regard to how they value early marriage?”*

*“How do NGOs take local values of early marriage into account?”*

The microsystem contains the important actors and factors that directly influence girls and how girls value EM through proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). When asked where they got their knowledge on early marriage from and by whom they were influenced, girls identified caregivers, teachers and religious leaders as important and influential to them. Consequently, the perceptions of these three groups are explored in Section 6.2. Subsequently, Section 6.3 engages with how these key actor groups influence and shape each other’s perceptions of early marriage at meso-level. Finally Section 6.4 provides a summary and conclusion of this chapter.

## 6.2 Values of Key Actors at Micro-level

### 6.2.1 Caregivers: Change Comes (Slowly)

To begin with, it has to be noted that caregivers have a key position with regard to early marriage. Not only do they influence girls’ perceptions directly (as reported by 16 out of 20 girls), caregivers are also the initiators and decision makers on early marriage. This last part is illustrated by caregiver Dawit (37, male: I35), who states:

*“If there is a case of marriage, parents have already arranged the marriage before they tell the boy and girl. Parents know what is best and decide, children have to obey them.”*

Especially out-of-school girls and married girls confirmed Dawit's statement about the position of caregivers.

Most of the caregivers involved in this study (11 out of 14) indicated during the interviews that they valued EM in a negative way. However, three caregivers indicated that they did not feel strongly in favour or against EM. Especially female caregivers had strong opinions about EM and did not want their daughters to be in the same situation as themselves. However, female caregivers did acknowledge that they were not sure if they could do something about it if their husband would decide on EM. This corresponds with how Teferi (2014) describes the power relations between men and women in a marriage and in Ethiopian society as a whole.

It has to be noted that all the caregivers (N=14) had been married off 'early' themselves. Reasons for their early marriage, according to caregivers related to EM being a tradition that was considered 'normal', the practice was 'common' and that 'they did not know any better' (see Vignette 8 for an example).

Many caregivers indicated that they currently value EM in a more negative way than they did before. As reason for this they reported

*"I married for the first time when I was 18 years old and she was 4. But because she did not grow fast enough I divorced her. After this I married a girl of 11 years old ...[.]... I was told this was a good thing. Now I understand that this is bad. I was not aware before, but now I do not want my youngest daughters to get married before they complete education and are above 18."*

Yohannes (40, male: I24)

that ideas and norms about EM are changing in **Vignette 8. Changed My Mind** society in general. *"Now it is no longer as common ... Now we are thinking more modern. Also because this [early marriage] is illegal, you can no longer do it."* (Feker, 38, female: I31). Noteworthy is that in this statement Feker labelled the people in her *kebele* as 'modern' which she appeared to contrast with early marriage as such conceptualising EM as a 'tradition' or 'HTP'. Furthermore, she indicated that the principal reason to not engage in early marriage is the illegality of the practice instead of it being deemed to be in best interest of the child. Some caregivers reported how they were personally confronted with the risks of EM. Etefu (56, male: I56), who is a father who lost his daughter due to giving birth at a young age and is now an opinion leader against EM in his village, reported this:

*“This was so terrible [...] but also really opened my eyes. Now I do not want this to happen to other people. So if I hear that there is a case of early marriage, I go talk to the parents. I have followed a training now and I am fighting against it.”*

When rejecting EM, caregivers mostly focused on the negative social and health consequences of early marriage, which they related to respectively changing societal norms and personal experiences.

When asked about the high prevalence of EM in their *kebele*, some caregivers named ‘*gidigit*’ as the reason. This is a traditional custom, which consists of a social bond created between two families with the aim of improving their social position. NGO-workers indicated that *gidigit* is not a very likely motivation for EM, since principally rich people practice *gidigit*. Tsegay (45, male NGO-worker: I48) stated: *“They are probably mentioning this custom because they do not want to tell about the economic reasons. They are proud.”* Hereby Tsegay indicated that covert economic reasons could be an underlying motivation for engaging in early marriage.

The fact that caregivers do not wish to be open about these reasons, might be based in ‘proudness’ and the desire to depict their *kebele* in a more ‘positive’ way to an outsider, as Tsegay explained, or to, for example, my positionality as a western researcher. Other reasons given by caregivers did openly focus on economic needs, thereby relating to both the economic reasons named by Parsons et al. (2015) and to Archambault (2011) who acknowledges EM as an economic livelihood adaptation. The positive aspects of EM, that some caregivers mentioned, consisted mostly of economic reasons to engage in early marriage.

In more accessible *kebeles*, where projects have been implemented or where societal norms are shifting, many NGO-workers and caregivers indicated that EM happens more in private or in secret. This ‘covert practicing’ of early marriage complicates the prevention and research on EM. Furthermore, I was sometimes particularly suspicious of socially desirable answering during interviews with caregivers. Vignette 9 illustrates the complex situation around EM and my role as a researcher.

When walking through an ‘accessible’ *kebele* after visiting a school for interviews, a group of girls approached us and told us that there were rumours in the *kebele* about a specific house where there was ‘*marriage in the house*’. After checking with the local NGO-worker we decided to visit the house to interview the caregivers. At first, the caregivers denied having a daughter in the ‘*marriageable age group*’ at all. After assuring them that we were not in any way linked to the police the caregivers very hospitably invited us in. These caregivers struck me as having little financial means, in comparison to the rest of the village. Their clothes were ripped to shreds and they did not have any furniture in their house. In between them on the ground lay their baby. Since both caregivers were scared and suspicious of the voice recorder I did not record the interview. Then, the caregivers told us that they in fact did have a daughter of 13 years old, but that they were not intending to marry her any time soon. Halfway the interview the mother - who answered all the interview questions so far - mentioned the neighbours who talked negatively and sent us to her house.

R: “*Why do you think the people in the village are saying that there is a ‘marriage in the house’ here?*”

The father stepped in to answer, and agitatedly said:

P: “*They are just jealous of our very good marriage contract!*”

The mother looked alarmed and urged him to stop talking. It appeared as if the statement of the father referred to a marriage contract the caregivers had established for their daughter.

After this, both did not want to talk about early marriage any more. Respecting this, I decided to ask some other not EM-related questions. After thanking them, we left the house. To me, this situation illustrates how complex the situation around EM is, even if NGOs are working in the *kebele* and legal enforcement is present. Furthermore, it illustrates the difficult position I had as a researcher when engaging with such a sensitive, controversial topic.

-Aringo *kebele*, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015 (Retrieved from FN15)

### Vignette 9. Marriage in the House

#### 6.2.2 Teachers: Activists Against Early Marriage

For girls in school, teachers play a crucial role in their daily lives. Girls indicated that teachers not only played a role in their education but also served as an example for them. Emebet (13, in-school: I2) illustrated this as follows: “*Teachers are the most influential. Because they are educated and knowledgeable about early marriage they are an example for us girls. I also want to become educated like them.*” Noteworthy is that all statements about education, including that of Emebet, seem to relate to formal education only. Teachers were aware of their exemplary role, which Emebet described in her statement, and of the important role they have with regard to informing and protecting girls of early marriage.

“*What we try to do is to create awareness of the consequences; we inform girls about it and talk about it openly. In this way we try to contribute to a change of mind in society.*”

Samuel (27, male teacher: I21).

In addition, most teachers taking part in this study (four out of five) indicated they had a special role in the EM prevention system, for example, as leader of an SRH-club. For girls these teachers are the first person to report an EM to, after which the teacher can report the EM to the *kebele*-administrator. Teachers indicated to have taken up this important role, because they felt very strongly against EM. Girma (24, male teacher: I49) for example states: *“I see myself as an activist, doing what I can to make this practice stop.”* The responsibility to take an active role in the prevention of early marriage, that Girma indicated to feel, corresponds to what several other teachers reported.

All teachers rejected EM strongly. Teachers attached negative values to EM, which were largely focused on the health-, economic- and education-related consequences of EM. Teachers gave elaborate, rational answers describing these negative effects, resembling the responses of in-school girls.

Several teachers mentioned the difficult position that they find themselves in in their *kebele*. Teachers acknowledged the important role they have in the lives of girls with regard to informing them on EM and being their confidant. According to them, this role can sometimes be in contrast with the respect – or lack thereof – they receive from some caregivers. Selassie (31, male teacher: I47) argued:

*“Sometimes we tried to cancel an early marriage because a girl or other girls came to us... But we did not manage to do it, because parents did not listen to us. They do not respect us. Sometimes they even fight with us.”*

The ‘lack of respect’ that Selassie pointed out, seems to be because teachers do not come from the *kebele* themselves but are sent there by the government and because they are regarded as different by the caregivers. Girma (24, male teacher: I49) thought: *“Because we do not work on the land, and because they are often not educated some do not trust us.”* In this quote, Girma mentioned a potential gap between educated and uneducated people that can exist within *kebeles*. This ‘gap’ is addressed later on in this thesis. At this point it has to be acknowledged that there are large differences between *kebeles* with regard to the position of teachers in the community. Teachers in more accessible *kebeles* or *kebeles* where NGOs were active seemed to be more positive about their role and position in society than teachers in more remote *kebeles*.

### 6.2.3 Religious Leaders: Double Standards

Priests play a central role with regard to EM. Not only are priests the actor group reported by girls and caregivers to be most influential, they also formally conduct the marriages. In other words, conducting an early marriage without a priest is not possible.

Officially, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church supports government law that prohibits marriage under 18. Regional church leader Tedros (35, male: I41) reported that the church publicly speaks out against early marriage and encourages local priests to do the same during their church services. Tedros provided me with the ‘Developmental Bible’ a manual developed in 2009 in collaboration with UNFPA that helps priests to incorporate developmental topics such as HTPs, gender equality and population issues into their services or ceremonies (UNFPA, 2009). Tedros states:

*“We use this educational tool in trainings we give to local priests and religious leaders....[..]... It [the Developmental Bible] strongly rejects early marriage and other Harmful Traditional Practices.”*

After having the Developmental Bible translated, it turned out that the manual rejects EM in a rather short and concise way by referring to the higher risks of divorce and HIV-AIDS. This conciseness might be reflective of the complicated position that the church is in. On the one hand, it is important for the church to be supportive of the government and their laws against early marriage and, on the other hand, the church is a key advocate of social norms regarding virginity and fertility, norms which are thought to be important explanatory factors of the high prevalence of early marriage.

At local (*kebele*) level, the situation seemed to be varied. Some local priests (4 out of 9) very openly spoke out against EM, following the reasoning of Tedros and the Developmental Bible. These priests mainly emphasized the negative social and health aspects of EM. However, two of these three priests stated that even though they reject EM, they were aware of the fact that some of their older fellow priests did still conduct EMs. Other priests (2 out of 9) indicated they rejected EM because the church does so and because it is illegal. When asked for reasons or ideas behind their rejection, these priests indicated to not know why 18 years was the appropriate age other than because marriage was legal from this age on. It seemed as if this negative idea was not completely ‘internalised’ and it is possible that socially desirable answers were provided.

Two priests (out of 9) openly indicated to value EM positively. For example, Gebreel (61, male: I39):

*“The Bible is very clear about this [.. quotes from the Bible.. ] It says very clearly that Eve was united with Adam in Paradise at the age of 14. Therefore we see 14 as the appropriate and right age for marriage.”*

Gebreel referred to the Bible in order to justify the ‘right age for marriage’. In doing so, he emphasized the religious arguments in favour of early marriage. Furthermore, these two priests emphasized the importance of tradition and the importance of keeping virginity and chastity for girls. These priests focused on the positive religious and social aspects of EM.

Several participants indicated that some priests condemn EM in their church services because they ‘have to’, but keep supporting EM in private. This difference was interpreted negatively and addressed by caregiver Alemnesh (51, female: I17), who stated:

*“The problem is with the priests ... The one that is at the church now, he preaches that EM is bad. In the meantime, he just decided to marry a virgin girl of 13 years old and take her out of the school. They say if you marry a priest, you have to be very pure and clean [be a virgin].”*

Two other participants indicated to regard the situation to which Alemnesh refers in her statement - wherein priests publicly condemn EM but continue to conduct marriages or even engage in EM themselves - as hypocritical and not credible. Concluding, it appeared that local priest’s values of EM can be categorized as mixed-positive, whereby there seemed to be differences between older and younger priests and between priests that did and did not receive training on EM.

Table 6

Summary of Values of EM by Key Actor Group

	Caregivers (N=14)	Teachers (N=5)	Religious leaders (N=9)
<b>Role in EM process</b>	Decision-makers	Informing girls & role in prevention	Conducting the EMs
<b>General value of EM</b>	Mixed/negative	Negative	Mixed/positive
<b>Specific value of EM</b>	Negative – social & health	Negative – health, education & economic	Negative – illegal & health
	Positive – economic	Positive – none	Positive – religious, social
<b>Main advantages of EM</b>	Relations with good families, improved economic position	None	According to Bible 14 years, virginity, chastity
<b>Main disadvantages of EM</b>	Health consequences, societal norms have changed	Health Risks, school drop-out, limited future options, poverty cycle	Punishable by law, risk of HIV-AIDS and divorce
<b>Appearance in Research</b>	Open, referring to personal experiences	Open, strong against, frustrated over position	Mixed, suspicious, authoritative
<b>Additional Issues Raised</b>	Covert marriages & Societal changes	Difficult position of Teachers	Differences between older and younger priest

### 6.3 Meso-level: Who Influences Who?

All participants were asked questions about who influenced their opinion, where they got their information on EM from and whose opinion they valued most. In line with the described idea of local actors being ‘*experts in their own lives*’ as acknowledged by among others African feminists, local participants’ ideas were leading. Accordingly, their ideas and answers were analysed and an overview of the outcomes is provided in Figure 5.

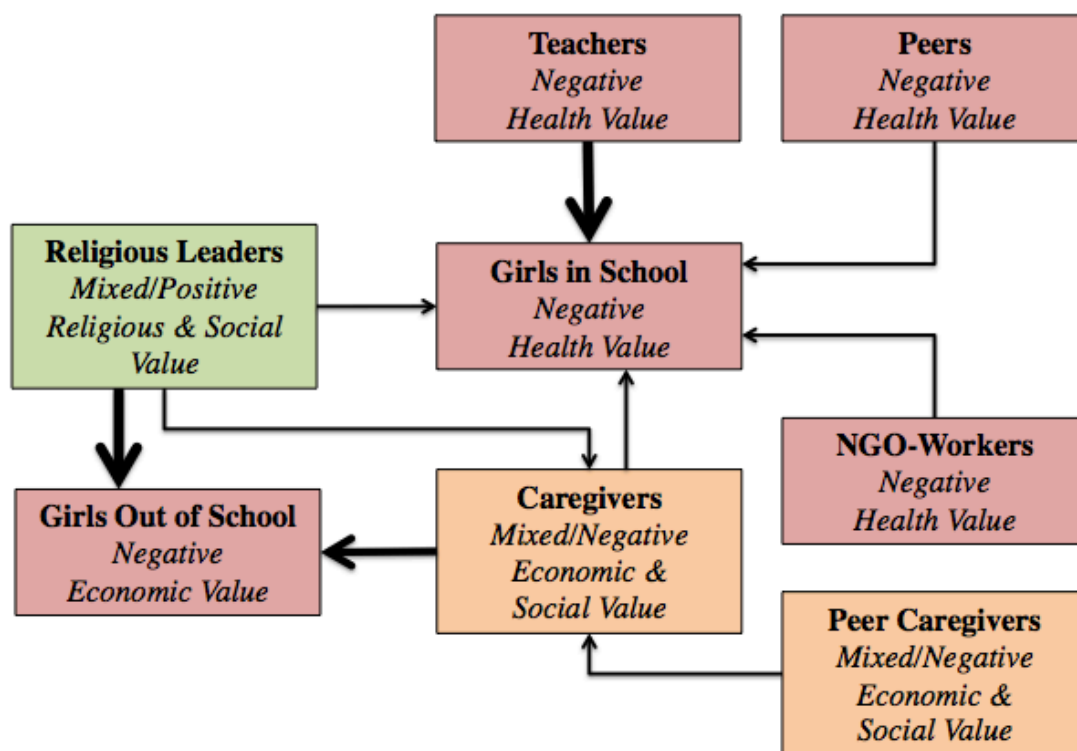


Figure 5. Shaping Values

*Explanation of the Figure:*

Figure 5 shows how the different actor groups value EM and how they appeared to perceive and shape each other's values. For clarity, the actors positioned in red boxes mainly value EM negatively, the actors in the orange boxes in a mixed-negative way and those in the green boxes value EM in a mixed-positive way. The thickness of the arrows in the figure displays the extent of influence the group *seemed to have* on perceptions of the other group.

Three important findings came forward from this analysis of actor groups. First, what catches the eye is the fragile position of out-of-school girls. Out-of-school girls indicated to be strongly influenced by religious leaders (6 out of 8 girls) and to a lesser extent by their caregivers (4 out of 8 girls). Noteworthy is the fact that of these two actor groups religious leaders are categorized as *mixed/positive* and caregivers as *mixed/negative*. Out-of-school girls therefore appear to be influenced by two key actor groups that (1) by comparison, valued EM most positively, and (2) where most socially desirable answers during the study appeared to be provided. This does imply that out-of-school girls might be less resilient and have less of a support network. The

facts that out-of-school girls are at higher risk of EM and have less access to a prevention system (see Section 5.2), illustrate that the situation of out-of-school girls regarding EM is particularly precarious. However, it was noteworthy that all out-of-school girls perceived EM negatively, despite these ‘more positive’ influences.

Second, what becomes apparent is the completely different position of in-school girls. In-school girls identified five different actor groups of influence: teachers, caregivers, peers, priests and NGO workers. Of these actor groups, teachers, peers and NGO workers emphasized the negative health aspects of EM. The data suggest that in-school girls have internalised these negative health-focused arguments provided to them by teachers or through SRH-clubs. This internalisation of ideas corresponds with findings about in-school girls regarding teachers as their example and greatest source of influence and information (10 out of 12 girls). These findings illustrate the potential effect of formal education and NGO-presence on both the position and values of girls.

Third, a salient contradiction between girls’ ideas and that of the other actors emerged. Girls indicated that educated people, such as teachers, are most respected and have great influence on the values of other actors in the community. However, no other member of the community named teachers, girls or educated people in general as such. Even after posing specific questions about the influence of these groups, the majority of the caregivers and other actors involved in the study did not think ‘educated’ people were of substantial influence on the perceptions of EM in their *kebele*. This perception corresponds with the concern raised by some teachers about their ambivalent position in the *kebele*, as described in the previous section. The data illustrate 1) how different actor groups can have contrasting perceptions on the position of teachers within the *kebele* and 2) how dynamics between ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ people in a *kebele* can influence perceptions of EM and possibly the prevention thereof.

Fourth, it is important to note that in-school girls were the only actor group to name NGO workers as a large influence. This is probably because project activity focused mainly on SRH-clubs that are provided to girls through the school.

## 6.4 Local Values and NGOs

This section addresses three topics relevant to the relation between local values and NGOs. To begin with, how NGOs selectively target *kebeles* for the implementation of prevention efforts is discussed, after which the implications of the recently implemented anti-NGO law on the NGO's approach are explained. Concluding, the section addresses how NGOs take local understandings of early marriage into account in their prevention efforts.

### 6.4.1 Selective Targeting of Kebeles

As stated in the previous chapter, WCAT directly targeted girls. Other manners the organization used to influence opinions and values within the community were through village meetings and specific sensitization workshops for various actors, such as caregivers and religious leaders, who formed their indirect target group (WCAT, 2015: Document 4). Both accounts provided by participants (e.g. I7, I13 and I27) and my own observations (FN26) mentioned the great observable difference between *targeted kebeles* and *untargeted kebeles*. Hereby, *targeted kebeles* are *kebeles* where one of the three NGOs had implemented an EM-related project, whereas *untargeted kebeles* had not experienced any (EM-related) NGO-activity yet. An important remark here is that all *targeted kebeles* were among the 'more accessible *kebeles*' that were located more closely to Debre Tabor town and to the main road. NGOs regard this as a challenge, which Tsegay (45, male NGO-worker: I48) explains as follows:

*"The government criticizes us for not targeting the more remote kebeles, where they say prevalence might be higher ... These [kebeles] are difficult to access for us and can be dangerous, this is a real challenge for us ... I do not want to go there."*

Tsegay indicated that these *kebeles* are difficult to access by road and that NGO-workers feel 'unsafe' working in these remote *kebeles*, due to criminality. The challenge Tsegay described corresponds with statements from a WSO-office worker (33, female: I11), who stated that of the 43 *kebeles* in Farta Woreda, less than half were covered by the three NGOs together whereby the majority of the uncovered *kebeles* could be categorized as 'remote' and 'less accessible'. Thus, NGOs selective targeted *kebeles* based on accessibility where they aimed to influence opinions and ideas about early marriage.

### *6.4.2 Covert Rights-Based Approach*

All NGOs reported to have worked mostly on rights-based topics before the NGO-law was implemented. When asked about their approach to early marriage WCAT – just like the other NGOs – referred to the recently implemented NGO-law and the difficulties that stem from this. The law, which came into place in 2009, highly constrains NGOs that receive partial foreign funding in working on rights-related issues. (Nega & Milofsky, 2011). According to Tsegay (45, male NGO-worker: I48):

*“There are many difficulties we had due to this law, because there is increased monitoring and checking of our activities. Especially for international NGOs it is now difficult to keep working on sensitive issues.”*

When questioned about the NGO-law specifically, Mikael (32, male NGO-worker: I42) reported the following:

*“This can become a problem for us. So we have to work around these [rights-based terminologies]. We are experienced in this.. also, I am good at making friends here (laughing).”*

In Mikael’s statement two points came forward. First, and most importantly, he suggested that even though working with a rights-based approach was not allowed, NGOs were still working in the same way. Drawing from the data I argue that NGOs may have adopted a ‘*covert rights-based approach*’. That is, some NGOs did follow a rights-based approach without actually speaking of one or using rights-based discourse. The avoidance of rights-based language was confirmed by other NGO staff members, such as Tsegay (45, male NGO-worker: I48), who stated:

*“... For example we can not say, ‘yes we are working on the right to education’ ... So then we can say: we are building a school.”*

This statement of Tsegay implies that NGOs kept working on the same topics, while framing their approach as not rights-related.

Second, Mikael’s quote highlights the importance of retaining good (formal and informal) relations with government at regional level. How these relations can create differences between NGOs was described by more NGO-workers. In the words of Mikael again:

*“They [referring to a larger international NGO working on EM in the area] have the best relations with local government. This is to great advantage for them ... and it makes it easier [for them] to get permissions and to conduct new activities.”* (Mikael, 32, male: I42).

Both issues – the necessity of maintaining good relations with local government and of working within the NGO-law – underline the complicated conditions NGOs working on EM-prevention in Ethiopia have to navigate.

#### *6.4.3 Taking Local Values into Account*

When asked about how NGOs take the local values of early marriage into account, all NGOs indicated to actively involve a community before the implementation of an EM-project. Tsegay (45, male: I48) stated for example:

*“It is incredibly important for us to have the community on our side, we need to establish contacts within the community first and talk to them about what is going on in the kebele.”*

However, from Tsegay’s statement it remains unclear whether ‘getting the community on their side’ is relevant to the organization because this can provide WCAT with insight into their opinions and values about early marriage or because this can lead to, for example, higher programme efficacy.

Furthermore, when looking at the direct link between local understandings of early marriage and NGO-policy, there is large overlap between the perceptions of in-school girls and teachers, and the substance of NGO and governmental messages. This overlap is likely to be due to the fact that prevention efforts were primarily targeted at these actor groups, and that girls and teachers involved in the study appeared to be repeating what they learned through efforts of NGOs and government. However, drawing on the data it could be concluded that the understandings and values that other actor groups attached to EM, were not sufficiently taken into account by WCAT.

Several crucial actor groups, such as out-of-school girls and caregivers, emphasized the economic aspects of early marriage, arguing that poverty leads to EM and that EM can in turn lead to poverty. Furthermore, Kidist (14, out-of-school girl: I18) and Selassie (31, male teacher: I47) emphasized the link between dropping out of school and poverty. By fore fronting ‘*improving the socioeconomic position of girls*’ as a central objective of their EM-project, WCAT did focus on economic aspects of early marriage. However, given prevention efforts did not first and foremost target these actor groups, it could be argued that the economic value was not a main focus in trainings and that there was no direct economic improvement-component included in the project. Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the

economic aspects of early marriage were not adequately addressed by prevention efforts of WCAT.

When contrasting this approach with that of other NGOs, it appeared that one other NGO (CARE) did actively take economic values into account and implemented a livelihood improvement project in combination with SRH-training. Mikael (32, male: I42) explained:

*“.. We are focusing on improving the economic financial situation of an entire kebele... Since they depend on their land and crops, we see it is important to improve this and create more security for them ... [We] try to offer alternatives so that they do not fall into poverty and have to engage in early marriages.”*

Reflecting on Mikael's statement, it appears as if integrating more project component that relate to economic aspects of early marriage can result in more sustainable change in a *kebele* in the sense that it might 1) reach actor groups currently not participating in projects due to their economic situation and 2) decrease an important direct reason to engage in early marriage. Learning from CARE's experience, it could be argued that including the economic value in prevention efforts as well, leads to a more comprehensive and sustainable approach against early marriage.

## 6.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter demonstrated the values of identified key actor groups at micro-level (teachers, religious leaders and caregivers) and how these key actor groups influence each other's perceptions of EM at meso-level. This study revealed that caregivers had an important role as decision makers regarding early marriage and had large influence on other caregivers', in-school girls' and out-of-school girls' understandings of early marriage. Caregivers' perceptions of early marriage are categorized as mixed/negative. That is, caregivers focused on both the negative health implications that EM brings about while also emphasizing the economic and social reasons to engage in early marriage. Their responses resonate most with principles underlying sociocultural and economic approaches as discussed in Chapter 3.

Teachers stated they were strong advocates against early marriage, but acknowledged their limited and complicated position in communities in this respect. Teachers regarded EM in a strongly negative way whereby they focused on the health, educational and economic implications of EM. In doing so, teachers'

responses were most akin to rights-based approaches or KAP-approaches (see Chapter 3). Teachers' ideas overlapped to large extent with those of in-school girls and with the ideas about early marriage that were promoted by NGOs. Teachers appeared to have a strong influence on perceptions of in-school girls, but did not have a substantial influence on perceptions of other actors in the community.

Religious leaders or priests were highly respected in the community and had a strong influence on the perceptions of out-of-school girls, in-school girls and caregivers. The perceptions of priests with regard to EM are to be categorized as mixed/positive. Meaning, that while a few local priests had received training about EM and were actively working against the practice, others justified EM by referring to passages from the Bible or to norms about virginity and chastity. Both the positive and negative aspects of early marriage that priests mentioned were akin to ideas of sociocultural approaches. Furthermore, a high degree of social desirability was suspected in the responses given to the questions I posed during data collection, especially among caregivers and religious leaders. This might be related to my positionality as a western researcher, corresponding to Legard et al. (2003) who argue that actors might misrepresent their attitudes when confronted with a researcher of a different background and Goredema (2010) about the limiting positionality of the (Western) researcher.

Furthermore, NGOs reported that the working situation regarding sensitive topics, such as early marriage, had become more complicated due to the implementation of the anti-NGO law that forced NGOs to redress their rights-based approach to early marriage. Consequently, this study argues that the current approach of NGOs can thus be regarded as a 'disguised rights-based approach'. Concluding, it appeared that NGO prevention efforts resonate most with in-school and teachers' understandings of early marriage, since prevention efforts are primarily aimed at these target groups. Other crucial actors such as out-of-school girls emphasized the economic aspects of early marriage. These aspects and values were not sufficiently taken into account.

The following chapter, the discussion, will engage into more detail with the findings of this research and relate them to the earlier presented theoretical framework.

## 7. Conclusion and Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

The final chapter of my thesis starts with providing an answering to the main research question, as presented below, by integrating and connecting the information presented in the different data chapters per sub research question (Section 7.2). Subsequently Section 7.3 aims to more closely examine the findings of this study and to bring them into dialogue with the theoretical framework as developed in Chapter three. In this section, a revised conceptual framework is provided based on the findings and discussions of this study. Subsequently, I critically reflect on the study and present concluding reflections on my research in Section 7.4. Finally, I conclude with a series of recommendations for policy and practice (Section 7.5) and for future research (Section 7.6) that follow from the outcomes of my research.

*“How do different key actors value early marriage of girls and young women in Amhara region in Ethiopia and how do local NGOs take into account these local understandings in early marriage prevention efforts?”*

### 7.2 Providing an Answer to the Research Questions

*“How do girls and young women value early marriage and what are the differences between girls and young women based on individual level characteristics such as school attendance and marital status?”*

Drawing on the data, I argue that girls and young women valued early marriage in a negative way. Differences between in-school and out-of-school girls emerged, in the sense that they put emphasis on different aspects and causes of early marriage. The results of this study reveal that in-school girls regarded early marriage as a harmful traditional practice, lack of knowledge and health issue whereby their arguments resonated most with sociocultural and rights-based approaches. In contrast, out-of-school girls perceived early marriage more in economic terms and emphasized poverty as both the main cause and consequence of early marriage. Their arguments resonated most with economic approaches. In addition, in-school girls regarded early marriage in a more rational, impersonal way, whereas out-of-school girls valued early

marriage in a more personal, emotional way. Both these differences between in- and out-of-school girls seemed to be amplified by the vulnerable position out-of-school girls had due to lack of access to both a support network and a prevention system.

Another important area of difference identified during the study was that between the views of married versus unmarried girls. Both groups of girls perceived large differences between married and unmarried girls with regard to their physical appearance, economic position and future dreams. That is, unmarried (often in-school) girls looked cleaner and well nourished compared to the girls who got married early, had better economic perspectives and had dreams about how they wanted their lives to look like in the future. Married girls tended to regard early marriage in more negative terms than unmarried girls, emphasizing economic reasons and specifically, their own impoverished state.

*“How do key actors at micro-level value early marriage and how do these actors influence each other at micro-level with regard to how they value early marriage?”*

According to girls, caregivers, religious leaders and teachers were the most important actors at these levels that interacted with girls regularly. In other words, girls identified these three groups as the most important actors in terms of shaping girls’ perceptions and opinions about early marriage, which is why these three actor groups were included in this research.

Of these three groups, religious leaders valued early marriage most positively. In doing so, religious leaders focused principally on sociocultural arguments in favor of early marriage by emphasizing the importance of social norms around divorce, chastity and virginity. During this research, a large discrepancy became visible between regional church policy that strongly rejects early marriage by means of the Developmental Bible and local priests that were responsible of conducting the (early) marriages in the *kebele*. Priests appeared to be a highly respected group in society that had direct and substantial influence on values of out-of-school girls and their caregivers.

In this study values of caregivers regarding early marriage were categorized as mixed-negative. That is, while most caregivers focused on the negative social and health aspects of early marriage, such as risks of maternal death or fistula, others put emphasis on the economic advantages of engaging in early marriage, such as the bride

price. Caregivers appeared to influence their daughters' values of early marriage, whereby out-of-school girls were more strongly influenced by their caregivers than in-school girls.

The third group, that is, schoolteachers manifested themselves as activists against early marriage, strongly emphasizing the negative health and educational aspects of early marriage. Their accounts seemed to be underpinned by notions of rights. During the research, teachers' complicated position in society came forward, illustrated by the fact that teachers 1) were not highly respected in the community in general and 2) only influenced in-school girls' values directly.

In conclusion, the actors at micro- and meso-level value early marriage in highly different ways, whereby religious leaders' perceptions of early marriage were most positive, caregivers held mixed-negative perceptions and teachers most strongly opposed early marriage. Furthermore, suspicions of social desirable answering, for example in the sense that prevalence of early marriage was denied, became apparent among especially some priests and caregivers. Some actors indicated to feel suspicious of possible ties of this study to law enforcement.

*“How do local NGOs conceptualise early marriage and how do they take the local values attached to early marriage into account in prevention efforts?”*

The researched NGO seemed to conceptualize EM principally as an educational issue, indicative of a lack of knowledge and as an HTP stemming from tradition, hereby resonating with rights-based discourse. In prevention efforts, the NGO was seen to be taking a KAP-approach focused on providing knowledge about the consequences of early marriage in the expectation that this would lead to a change in attitudes and practice with regard to early marriage. As noted, an ‘anti-NGO’ law came into place in Ethiopia in 2009, complicating work of NGOs geared to promoting rights (Nega & Milofsky, 2011). This study argues that the alternative approach NGOs take, i.e. because of this law, could be regarded as a ‘disguised’ rights-based approach.

Drawing on the data, I conclude that the conceptualization the local NGO held corresponds limited to local understandings of early marriage. Consequently, the approach adopted by the NGO corresponded most with the values of in-school girls and teachers. The correspondence with these two actor groups can be explained by the

fact that prevention efforts are primarily focused on SRH-clubs that are provided to in-school girls and teachers through the formal education system. Teachers and in-school girls seem to take over the information, viewpoints and language used by the local NGO. The data furthermore suggest that the economic values attached to EM by several other critical actor groups involved in this study, were not sufficiently taken into account. Poverty and other economic reasons for engaging in early marriage that appeared to be crucial factors in local understandings and meanings of early marriage, were not touched upon. I argue that economic values should be taken into account by including livelihood improvement components in EM-prevention projects. Including these components could be reflective of the recognition of more local voices, a larger target group reach and more effective prevention.

## 7.3 Discussion

### *7.3.1 Concepts Underpinning Early Marriage*

I started this thesis by conceptualising and critically engaging with key concepts underpinning my research, such as early marriage, childhood and harmful traditional practices. For example, points of critique on the concept of HTP were provided containing that this concept departs from a western-centric point of view (Winter et al., 2002; Merry, 2003; Savell 2008) and glosses over the complexity of local realities (Omeje, 2001; Archambault 2011). However, during my research these points of criticism appeared to be disputable. For example, it became apparent that several local (indigenous) NGOs conceptualised EM as a HTP. Consequently, an interesting inconsistency emerged between my critical stance towards western-biased concepts on the one hand and the notion of regarding people as ‘experts in their own lives’ on the other hand – both ideas reflected in African feminisms (Arndt, 2002; Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Goredema, 2010).

The fact that local NGOs are using the same language as western donors could be indicative of how deeply ingrained western-centric approaches have become. After all, it is important to realise that local NGOs, such as WCAT, do depend – to important extent – on external funding. If this is the case, the question could be raised as to how ‘local’ local NGOs still are and if it makes sense to draw a distinction between ‘local’ and ‘international’. If local NGOs are using the same ‘western-

centric’ discourse as international organisations, then, what does it mean to listen to ‘local’ experts?

Authors such as Lahelma, Arnesen & Öhrn (2008) and Jahng (2010) use the notion of ‘travelling discourse’ to explain this phenomenon. Lahelma et al. (2010) argue that similar discourses can travel or circulate between nations, despite different foci in different local and national contexts, whereby these discourses become embedded in “*a dynamic of national particularity, asymmetry between nations and opportunism in terms of issues being raised*” (p.2). That is, discourse around a notion as HTP can travel to for example Ethiopia and local ‘experts’ can use this originally western-centric notion as a category or label. However, the meaning of this label (HTP) is embedded in and determined by the specific local Ethiopian context. In this sense, criticizing the use of HTP as a western-centric category, might gloss over the local nuances and implications of this use. Because of this, Lahelma et al. (2008) argue that ‘categories in use’ – such as HTP – and their implications should be critically investigated in their local context because this may open up the search for new dynamic notions that contribute toward transgressing limits and categories.

### *7.3.2 Mainstream Approaches Towards Early Marriage*

In order to explore the local values attached to EM, I developed a tripartite framework to distinguish between existing western-based ‘mainstream’ approaches to early marriage, that is, those that build on sociocultural, economic and/or rights-based motivations. The first category of approaches, sociocultural approaches argue that early marriage is rooted in cultural and religious norms, such as norms regarding gender roles, power relations, fertility and keeping virginity (Tilson & Larson, 2000; Munshi & Myaux, 2006; Molla et al., 2008; Raj, 2010; Sultana, 2010; Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012; Scott & Palincsar, 2013; Teferi, 2014; Uddin, 2015). The sociocultural approaches include authors that divide cultures into strict typologies such as ‘collectivist’ or ‘individualist’ cultures (Hoffman, 1991; Dion & Dion 1993) and link early marriage to these types of cultures (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012). This dichotomous framing of culture has been strongly criticized for incorrectly assuming culture as static and bounded (Herzfeld, 2000; Fiske, 2002), for glossing over similarities between cultures (Schwartz, 1990) and for depicting collectivistic cultures as ‘underdeveloped’ (Eyetsemitan & Gire, 2003). The second set of approaches is economic in orientation, focusing on the economic value a child has for

the household (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973; Schultz, 1974; Friedman, et al., 1994 Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2010) as explanation for early marriage. Engaging in early marriage can relieve the financial burden on the family (Parsons et al., 2015) because early marriage generates a bride price (Alemu, 2008; Wahhaj, 2014), reduces costs for the girl's education (Raj, 2010) and provides security for children's future before parents die (Assefa et al., 2005). The third set of approaches might be understood as rights-based. Here early marriage is perceived to be a violation of several human and children's rights (Nour, 2009; Mutyaba, 2011), with interventions geared to transforming power relations by promoting human rights declarations. Criticism of these approaches contend that rights-based approaches are often utilised by organisations because of their discursive power (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Uvin, 2007), are too western-centric (Rana, 2007; Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Boyden et al., 2012), and lack effectiveness because they do not take local realities sufficiently into account (Omeje, 2001; Archambault, 2011; Miedema et al., 2015). This research was aimed at finding out how early marriage is valued locally and on how local values attached to early marriage relate to the reasons mentioned by these three mainstream approaches.

In my research all three approaches proved relevant because they linked directly to (elements of) answers given by the participants. Furthermore, exclusively categorizing participants' values into one approach proved to be challenging at times, therefore I had to categorize some participants' values in multiple categories. This was for example the case when caregivers told me they decided to take their daughter out of school. Primarily, poverty and securing the families' future could be pointed out as reasons for the caregivers' decision, whereas secondarily ideas on gender norms about women's roles in society determined that it was the girl instead of her brother who was taken out of school. Consequently, caregivers indicated that if the family had not been in financial need and poverty, both children probably would have still been in school. In this case it seems as if poverty (economic argument) was amplifying the gender norms in place (sociocultural argument), leading to an interplay between both types of approaches. I concur with Bicchieri and colleagues (2014) who argue that all these mainstream approaches should be regarded as partial explanations, instead of as grand encompassing theories.

Additionally, the mentioned example of caregivers taking their daughters out of school underlines the importance of economic components in the decision to take girls out of school. In the decision to engage in early marriage, the economic component played a crucial role as well. Many actors such as out-of-school girls and caregivers highlighted the economic value of early marriage and the role poverty plays. Even though the approaches interacted with each other, it seemed as if the economic arguments weighed most heavily. Because of this I would like to argue, in line with Jain and Kurz (2007) and Lee-Rife et al. (2012), that the importance of including an economic component in prevention efforts should be recognized.

While there is no doubt that early marriage in Ethiopia brings about negative consequences (Tilson & Larson, 2000; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Molla et al., 2008; Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009; Raj, 2010), I argue that a more nuanced view – than one of the mainstream approaches can provide – is needed. Most approaches build on more general ideas and tend to gloss over local lived realities and do not take the local specific context sufficiently into account (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). My study indicates that there is a complicated interplay between the different factors that determine the value of early marriage at local level. This study shows that instead of theories focusing on western-based generalising ideas about early marriage that are applicable in all types of cultures, an alternative approach is needed that is more sensitive to local context and the ideas that live there.

### *7.3.3 Alternative Approaches Towards Early Marriage*

As a possible alternative approach I explored the use of African feminisms in the study of early marriage. Whereas there are many forms of African feminisms (Arndt, 2002), all feminisms tend to heavily criticize western-based mainstream approaches for e.g. not taking the local African context sufficiently into account, assuming that there is a universal womanhood and for reducing women in other parts of the world to victim or ‘other’ (Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Chillisa & Ntseane, 2010). As Arndt (2002) explains, forms of African feminisms differ primarily in how they view the position of men in society. Furthermore, African feminists differ considerably in their perceptions about if and how western researchers should conduct research in African contexts. Goredema (2010) for example, questions if western researchers are entitled to study African realities at all, since they can make no legitimate claim to these

realities. On the other hand, authors such as Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) take a more moderate point of view and argue that a western researcher is allowed to conduct research in the African context, but should be aware of his/her identity, position in the western system and biases that stem from this. They argue that a researcher should take on the role of “*transformative healing researcher*” (p.625) by conducting value- and action-oriented research that aims to help the participants of the study. Summarizing, different views exist on how and if a researcher who is not from the African continent is allowed to conduct research in the African context exist.

Lyons (1999) extensively explains the ‘dilemma’ that western, middle-class researchers face when trying to conduct research in Africa. She argues that western researchers always come from ‘a position of power’ in the sense that they decide how to depict and give voice to the people they study. Furthermore, the ‘politics of identity’ and the fact that the audience of western academics is mainly ‘western’ imply that it is very difficult to avoid becoming part of “*a new colonial discourse*” (Lyons, 1999, p.12). Lyons concludes that not becoming part of this discourse is only possible by holding yourself as a researcher strongly accountable towards the researched ‘population’ by aiming to improve their lives.

The arguments presented by these scholars brought me important insights, but also caused a great dilemma with regard to this study. I agree with authors such as Nnaemeka (2003) and Goredema (2010) that I, as a western, white, middle-class female researcher cannot make any claim to African reality, can not regard myself as an expert and can not entirely avoid being biased in some way when conducting this research. However, with all these ideas in mind I decided to conduct research on a sensitive topic as early marriage in the Ethiopian context. Hereby, I aimed to be aware of all mentioned limitations and reservations involved with my positionality and position. In retrospect, I have to reflect that my position as a middle-class, white, western researcher played an enormous role during this research. Principally this role became apparent with regard to responses to my appearance (*ferengi*), the denial of the prevalence of early marriage and to socially desirable answering. In some instances, my presence had such a large influence on people that it can be called into question how ‘truthful’ their responses were. Instead of regarding this solely as a research limitation, I would also like to argue that it provides valuable information and lessons learned with regard to the impact and legitimacy of using a western

researcher to study sensitive topics in the African context. Based on my research experience, I strongly recommend more critically considering how we can cope with this ‘bias’ and the effects that stem from it and to what extent we are capable of studying African realities appropriately *before* starting research.

#### *7.3.4 The PPCT-Model as Structuring Tool*

In this study, I introduced the PPCT-Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) that is used as a structuring instrument during the analysis and presentation of the results. Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT-Model has proven to be a very flexible guiding tool through the data analysis and organization. Taking out and using only the three smallest layers of this model (individual, micro- and mesolevel) allowed me to zoom in and extensively analyse both the individual perceptions of girls, and the perceptions and influences of their direct environment. However, leaving out the macro- and exo-level of the model meant leaving out the wider power relations that played a role in the process of the formation of values on EM (Tudge et al., 2009). However, in order to obtain a full scope of all actors and power relations of influence on girls’ values of EM, future research should place EM in the wider context, by including the two broader layers of the PPCT-Model. Particularly in light of funding streams that have shown to have large influence on local practice through both direct influencing of NGO-policy and through ‘traveling discourse’, as discussed earlier, including broader layers in order to understand local practice seems highly relevant.

Furthermore, the PPCT-Model proved to be an appropriate tool for giving voice to not only western-based approaches but also to southern-based views, in the form of African feminisms. The model allowed me to position girls and young women in the centre and to base decisions on which actor groups to include solely on girls’ views and ideas. Hereby I was able to regard girls and young women as experts in their own lives. Sometimes this led to rather surprising decisions as not including extended family, boys in school and opinion leaders. While it might be relevant for future research to include these actor groups that would be expected to be of influence, following girls’ and young women’s perceptions can be regarded as a form of acknowledgement of their knowledge and expertise.

Another topic for discussion that is related to – but not fully covered by – my research question arose. Many laudable steps have been taken in Ethiopia to facilitate

prevention of EM and some excellent practices can be identified. These excellent practices are illustrated by the enthusiastic responses and quotes of girls and other actors in the community about both government- and NGO- activities. However, the reported NGO-law complicates the position of NGOs and makes it difficult to openly work on sensitive topics such as EM, thereby inhibiting NGOs from working in their most optimal form on prevention of EM. I would like to express my hope that there will be greater openness in the future, so that prevention efforts can become even more effective.

### *Revised Conceptual Scheme*

I adapted the conceptual scheme on a variety of points during the research process. Figure 6 displays the revised conceptual scheme. The main reason for this adaptation is that I tried to start this research process in an as open and unbiased way possible by considering girls and young women as experts in their own lives and by depending major choices in this research on their perceptions. As such, I let girls' and young women's perceptions guide choices with regard to for example which environments and actor groups they regarded as important and influential and with(in) which they interacted frequently.

As a result, I put four different environments in the initial conceptual scheme, while in the study the girls and young women named only three environments as important to them during the interviews; *home*, *school* and *church*. Consequently, the fourth environment at micro-level, *village*, was removed. Furthermore, the actor groups that were named by the girls and young women differed from the initial model. Teachers, caregivers and religious leaders were mentioned as influential actors at micro-level, which meant that other actor groups such as boys, siblings, local law enforcers and opinion leaders were not included. Finally, I moved the pink arrow (NGO-NGOworkers) in Figure 6 from the left side of the model to the right side, because it became apparent during the study that NGOs were aiming their activities (SRH-clubs) solely on in-school girls and teachers through the formal education setting (school environment).

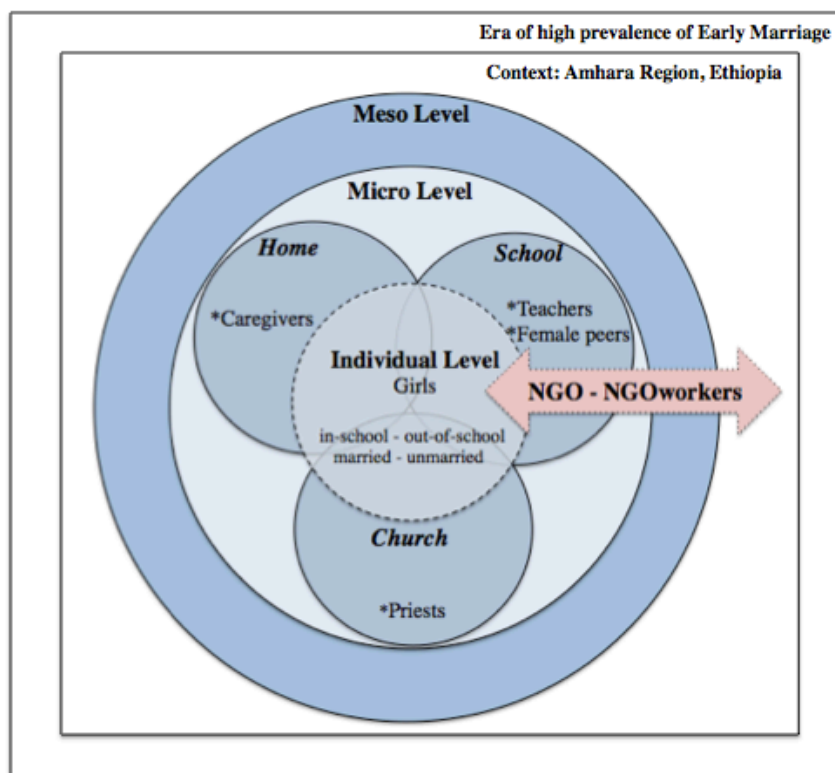


Figure 6. Revised Conceptual Scheme

## 7.4 Concluding Reflections on the Research Process

Before data collection in the field, a comprehensive research proposal was written. During this process I decided to focus on how early marriage was valued locally and on how these local understandings were taken into account by both local NGOs *and by the legal framework*. For this reason, I interviewed police officers, public persecutors and government officials working with EM cases in the field. During these interviews a variety of relevant topics regarding the legal component were revealed, such as the position of EM in the official and customary legal system and legal representatives' knowledge of the law. During the initial phase of my data collection in Ethiopia, I quickly discovered that these topics were rather complex and multifaceted. I decided that including them in my thesis would inevitably mean glossing over major nuances and would prevent me from going into depth on my main topic, that is, the values attached to early marriage. In light of these insights, I decided to remove questions concerning legal dimensions relating to early marriage and I narrowed down the main focus of data collection. Looking back, solely focusing

on values of EM and NGOs from the beginning would have allowed me to put more time in the field into studying these topics and related actor groups.

Subsequently, I would like to reflect on the range of methods that I employed in this study. The original idea of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods into a mixed methods design had to be discarded due to practical reasons. As explained earlier, this was largely due to the unfeasibility of implementing a survey among a largely illiterate target group. Because of this infeasibility in combination with the limited availability of an interpreter I decided it would be more valuable to conduct in-depth interviews with available target group participants. However, having to rely solely on qualitative methods gradually provided me with important insights about the unique and valuable information that only qualitative methods can produce. Therefore, when reflecting on my choice of methods, I recognize that I should have implemented a wider variety of qualitative methods, with a particular focus on participatory methods. Participatory methods fall within the scope of ideas African feminists have about showing the world from African women's perspective, displaying the relational power girls and women have and conducting value- and action-oriented research (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). Moreover, participatory methods could have provided unique information about a sensitive topic (like EM) that involves young or vulnerable groups (Aldridge, 2015). The recommendations for future practice and research that I provide in the following sections build directly on the lessons I learned in the field.

## **7.5 Policy and Practice Recommendations**

As argued in the introduction of this thesis, this study aimed to provide practical recommendations for NGOs working on the prevention of early marriage in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. In line with my role as "*transformative healing researcher*" (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010, p.625), I intend to contribute to improving practice by providing specific recommendations for policy and practice. Since my recommendations follow directly from the outcomes of this study and have already been touched upon, the points are summarized briefly here:

- **Remove obstacles for out-of-school girls to make use of the currently available early marriage prevention systems, provided through SRH-clubs and formal education.**

As stated above, in *kebeles* where there is an effective EM-prevention system in place, out-of-school girls indicated to lack access to this system. The current EM-prevention system in place could be made more accessible for out-of-school girls by actively promoting the prevention network in places that out-of-school girls attend, such as at village meetings or church ceremonies. Furthermore, de-linking SRH-clubs from the formal education system could make the clubs more accessible for out-of-school girls.

- **Implement projects targeted at married girls in order to improve their economic position and future prospects.**

Since most NGO-activities are aimed at the prevention of EM, (early) married girls are not part of the target group. However, the vast majority of the married girls interviewed in this study indicated they had limited economic possibilities and appeared to lack a future-oriented perspective. Actively targeting this group and adapting a project to the specific needs of young married women could improve the lives of girls and young women in this vulnerable group. Furthermore, arranging for policies to be supportive of married girls in school and enabling them to re-enter in school after marriage or giving birth could benefit this group of girls enormously.

- **Make teachers more effective actors of change by strengthening their position in society.**

My thesis put forward the voice of teachers regarding their position in society and their ideas about, and role in, the early marriage prevention process. As a group, teachers appeared to value early marriage most negatively. On the whole, teachers seemed to be willing to play a more active role in the prevention thereof. Consequently, I would like to argue that governance actors and NGOs should seek to improve teachers' position in society, give voice to teachers and take into account their opinions and suggestions, so that teachers can be more effective actors of change.

- **Include economic incentives or livelihood improvement in the form of agricultural components in early marriage prevention programs.**

Economic aspects of EM, such as poverty, came forward as main reasons for engaging in early marriage and for dropping out of school. Taking the economic values of EM into account and linking livelihood improvement components with EM components in a project could thus contribute in important ways to reducing the prevalence of early marriage, and – more indirectly – to more girls staying in school.

## 7.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Recommendations for future research on the topic of EM in Amhara Region that follow directly from both my experiences and the outcomes of this study are briefly presented here. Future research should:

- Include work of African scholars, such as African feminists, about conducting research in a value- and action-oriented manner, in order to combine research with efforts to improve girls' lives.
- Focus on local understandings and values of early marriage, and on the interplay of different factors within the specific context.
- Make use of alternative research methods such as participatory methods to obtain unique information about a topic as sensitive as early marriage.
- Give more voice to boys and explore their perceptions in research on early marriage, since boys are an essential actor group for both the continuation as the 'eradication' of early marriage.
- Look at the relevance of the idea of travelling discourses in relation to rights based discourse or harmful traditional practice in particular, within the Amharic context.
- Include broader contextual layers (such as macro- and exo-level forces) in the analysis of early marriage in order to provide a full picture, integrating e.g. funding streams and national policies.
- Finally, critically analyze what the implications of the positionality of the researcher are for the research topic before conducting the research. It can be called to question whether investigating sensitive topics in African local contexts is appropriate when e.g. being a western, middle-class researcher.

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## Appendices

### *APPENDIX I: Interview Guide per Actor Group*

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#### **1. Girls**

- How are you doing? (breaking the ice)
- How old are you? From which *kebele* are you?
- What do you think about marriage?
- What do you consider a good age for getting married? Why?
- What do you think about early marriage?
- Where did you learn about early marriage?
- Whose opinion/perceptions about early marriage do you value most? What are these opinions/perceptions?
- Do you see a difference between girls that go to school and girls that do not go to school? If so, what? Why? How does this make you feel?
- Do you see a difference between girls that are married and girls that are not? If so, what? Why? How does this make you feel?
- Do you know many girls that got married? Is early marriage common in this *kebele*? Is it common within your family? How does this make you feel?
- Whose opinions and perceptions do you think are most influential within society? Why?
- Why do you think girls get married early?
- If there would be a case of early marriage/yourself, what would you do? How would that make you feel?
- Do you have the feeling that you would be able to do something about this early marriage?
- How would you like to see yourself in the future? What are your dreams about your life?
- Are there other things you would like to talk about?

#### ***1.1 In-school Girls Addition***

- Do you like going to school? What do you like most about going to school? (breaking the ice)
- In what grade are you?
- Are you in SRH-club? If so, what do you think about it?
- Are you talking about EM in school? In SRH-club? If so, what did you discuss or learn?
- Prevention system?

#### ***1.2 Out-of-school Girls Addition***

- Did you go to school before? If so, until when did you attend school?
- Why did you drop out? How did that make you feel?
- What did change after dropping out of school?
- Are you afraid for early marriage for yourself?

### ***1.3 Married Girls Addition***

- When did you get married?
- How did you feel about getting married at the time?
- Did this feelings change? If so, how?
- Now, how do you feel about your marriage in specific?
- Were you enrolled in school? Why did you stop going to school?

### ***1.4 Unmarried Girls Addition***

- Would you like to get married? Why or why not?
- When would you like to get married? Why?
- If you would get married, would it be possible to continue school?

## **2. Caregivers**

- How are you doing? (breaking the ice)
- How old are you? Are you from this *kebele*? Did you go to school?
- Are you married? Do you have children?
- How do you think about early marriage? Why?
- Did your daughters/sons get married 'early'? If so, why?
- If not, at what age would you like your children to get married? Why?
- At what age did you get married yourself? Why?
- Did the way you think about early marriage change over time? If so, how?
- What do you consider a good age for getting married for your (still unmarried children)? Why?
- Where did you learn about early marriage? What?
- Is early marriage prevalent in this *kebele*
- Why do you think girls get married early in the community?
- Whose opinion/perceptions about early marriage do you value most? What are these opinions/perceptions?
- Whose opinions and perceptions do you think are most influential within society? Why?
- Are there people in favour of early marriage? Who? Why?
- If there would be a case of early marriage, what would you do? Feel?
- Do you have the feeling that you would be able to do something about this early marriage?
- How would you like to see yourself and your family in the future? What are your dreams for your children?

-Are there other things you would like to talk about?

### **3.Teachers**

- For how long have you been a teacher? In this *kebele* or another?
  - Do you like being a teacher? What do you like about it?
  - How old are you? Are you from this *kebele*?
  - How do you think about early marriage? Why?
  - Did the way you think about early marriage change over time? If so, how?
  - What do you consider a good age for getting married? Why?
  - Where did you learn about early marriage? What?
  - Is early marriage prevalent in this *kebele*?
  - Why do you think girls get married early in this community?
  - Whose opinion/perceptions about early marriage do you value most? What are these opinions/perceptions?
  - Whose opinions and perceptions do you think are most influential within society? Why?
  - Are there people in favour of early marriage? Who? Why?
  - If there would be a case of early marriage, what would you do? Feel?
  - Do you have the feeling that you would be able to do something about this early marriage?
  - How do you consider your role with regard to early marriage?
  - Do you talk about early marriage in the class? What do you discuss?
  - If relevant: Are you involved with SRH-club? Why?
  - Did you come across early marriage in your classes? If so, can you tell me about this?
  - What would you do if there were a girl in your class about to get married?
  - Does early marriage always lead to dropping out of school? On what does it depend?
  - Are there other things you would like to talk about?
- Added:
- How is the position of teachers in the *kebele*?

### **4.Religious Leaders**

- How are you doing? (breaking the ice)
- For how long have you been a priest at this church?
- Do you like being a priest in this church?
- How old are you?
- How do you think about early marriage? Why?
- Did the way you think about early marriage change over time? If so, how?
- What do you consider a good age for getting married? Why?
- Where did you learn about early marriage? What?

- Is early marriage prevalent in this *kebele*?
- Why do you think girls get married early in this community?
- Whose opinion/perceptions about early marriage do you value most? What are these opinions/perceptions?
- Whose opinions and perceptions do you think are most influential within society? Why?
- Are there people in favour of early marriage? Who? Why?
- If there would be a case of early marriage, what would you do? Feel?
- How do you consider your role with regard to early marriage?
- If parents would come to you with EM, what would you do?
- Are there other things you would like to talk about?

Added:

- Are marriages still conducted in this church? If so, why?
- Are other priests feeling the same way as you do or are there differences?

## **5. Local Leaders**

- What is your role/position? Can you tell me something about it?
- Are there other things you would like to talk about?
- What is your responsibility with regard to early marriage?
- What do you think about early marriage?
- Did the way you think about early marriage change over time? If so, how?
- What do you consider a good age for getting married? Why?
- Where did you learn about early marriage? What?
- Is early marriage prevalent in this *kebele*?
- Why do you think girls get married early in this community?
- Whose opinion/perceptions about early marriage do you value most? What are these opinions/perceptions?
- Whose opinions and perceptions do you think are most influential within society? Why?
- Are there people in favour of early marriage? Who? Why?
- If there would be a case of early marriage, what would you do? Feel?
- Do you have the feeling that you would be able to do something about this early marriage?
- What do you consider the main difficulties with regard to early marriage prevention?
- Are there other things you would like to talk about?

## **6. NGO-workers**

- What is your role? For how long have you been working here?
- Do you work on early marriage? What do you do?
- How do you think early marriage can best be prevented?

- How do you approach early marriage?
- Why do you think early marriage is still prevalent in this area?
- How do you think people perceive and value early marriage?
- Whose opinions do you think are most valued within the *kebele*?
- What are obstacles? Why?
- With which target groups are you working? Why?
- Do you involve local actors in prevention efforts? Which actors? How?
- Are there other things you would like to talk about?

Added:

- How is cooperation with the government? Are there difficulties? NGO-law?
- Are you working in remote *kebeles* as well? Why (not)?
- Are you depending on external funding?

## **7. Specific additional question for other actor groups:**

### **7.1 Law enforcers:**

- How does the community think about this?
- What is your personal experience with early marriage?
- Are many cases of early marriages handled by the police/militia?
- What are the main difficulties?

Added:

- Are you afraid of revenge in the community?
- Are early marriage cases tried through the customary law system? Why?

### **7.2 Public persecutor:**

- Are many cases of early marriage handled through this office?
- How does this work?
- What happens if someone reports an early marriage case?

Added:

- Why are only very few cases handled by the legal system?
- What do you think are the obstacles for people to make use of the system?
- Are early marriage cases tried through the customary law system? Why?

### **7.3 NGO-coordinator:**

- Is early marriage common in this area? How do you look at this? Why is early marriage prevalent?
- Can you tell me more about the situation around early marriage in Farta Woreda?
- Which NGOs are working on early marriage prevention here? Local/International?
- Which *kebeles* would you recommend me to visit? Why?

## *APPENDIX II: Participant List*

<b>Respondent-number</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>1</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl1	15	Female	Askuma Daramu
<b>2</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl2	13	Female	Aringo
<b>3</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl3	17	Female	Aringo
<b>4</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl4	16	Female	Giribi
<b>5</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl5	16	Female	Giribi
<b>6</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl6	17	Female	Askuma Daramu
<b>7</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Girl7	14	Female	Worken
<b>8</b>	Interview	01-07-15	Parent1	48	Male	Talda
<b>9</b>	Interview	02-07-15	Law_Enf1	33	Female	Farta District/ Debre Tabor
<b>10</b>	Interview	02-07-15	Law_Enf2	46	Female	Farta District/ Debre Tabor
<b>11</b>	Interview	02-07-15	NGO1	33	Female	Farta District/ Debre Tabor
<b>12</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Teacher1	35	Male	Segur
<b>13</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Girl8	13	Female	Segur
<b>14</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Girl9	14	Female	Segur
<b>15</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Girl10	12	Female	Segur
<b>16</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Girl11	10	Female	Segur
<b>17</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Parent2	55	Female	Segur
<b>18</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Girl12	14	Female	Segur
<b>19</b>	Focus Group Discussion	03-07-15	7 Girls	10 to 15	Female	Riyu Aparaguay
<b>20</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Teacher2	36	Male	Riyu Aparaguay
<b>21</b>	Interview	03-07-15	Teacher3	27	Male	Riyu Aparaguay
<b>22</b>	Focus Group Discussion	04-07-15	Religious Leaders	34 to 67	Male	Segur
<b>23</b>	Interview	06-07-15	Rel_Lead1	68	Male	Segur
<b>24</b>	Interview	06-07-15	Parent3	40	Male	Segur
<b>25</b>	Interview	06-07-15	Rel_Lead2	65	Male	Segur
<b>26</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Girl13	17	Female	Aringo
<b>27</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Girl14	14	Female	Aringo
<b>28</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Girl15	13	Female	Aringo
<b>29</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Girl16	17	Female	Aringo
<b>30</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Girl17	<18	Female	Aringo
<b>31</b>	Interview	07-07-15	Parent4	38	Female	Talda
<b>32</b>	Interview	09-07-15	Parent5	45&50	Female & Male	Aringo
<b>33</b>	Interview	13-07-15	NGO2	42	Male	Farta

						District/ Debre Tabor
34	Interview	14-07-15	Rel_Lead3	40	Male	Segur
35	Interview	14-07-15	Parent6	57	Male	Segur
36	Interview	14-07-15	Parent7	54	Male	Segur
37	Interview	14-07-15	Op_Lead1	54	Male	Segur
38	Interview	14-07-15	Parent8	55	Male	Segur
39	Interview	14-07-15	Rel_Lead4	61	Male	Debre Tabor Office
40	Interview	14-07-15	Op_Lead2	61	Male	Debre Tabor Office
41	Interview	14-07-15	Rel_Lead5	35	Male	Farta District
42	Interview	15-07-15	NGO3	32	Male	Debre Tabor Office
43	Interview	19-07-15	Girl18	14	Female	Gentenha
44	Interview	19-07-15	Girl19	13	Female	Gentenha
45	Interview	19-07-15	Girl20	15	Female	Gentenha
46	Interview	19-07-15	Rel_Lead6	40	Male	Magendi
47	Interview	19-07-15	Teacher4	31	Male	Magendi
48	Interview	21-07-15	NGO4	45	Male	Debre Tabor Office
49	Interview	22-07-15	Teacher5	24	Male	Magendi
50	Interview	25-07-15	Rel_Lead7	43	Male	Magendi
51	Interview	25-07-15	Op_Lead3	43	Male	Magendi
52	Interview	25-07-15	Rel_Lead8	32	Male	Magendi
53	Interview	25-07-15	Rel_Lead9	58	Male	Magendi
54	Interview	26-07-15	Parent9	44	Male	Magendi
55	Interview	26-07-15	Parent10	34	Female	Magendi
56	Interview	26-07-15	Parent11	56	Male	Magendi
57	Interview	26-07-15	Parent12	40	Female	Magendi
58	Interview	26-07-15	Parent13	42	Female	Magendi
59	Interview	26-07-15	Parent14	35	Female	Magendi
60	Interview	26-07-15	Law_Enf3	36	Male	Magendi
61	Interview	26-07-15	Law_Enf4	46	Male	Magendi
62	Interview	27-07-15	Op_Lead4	45	Female	Segur
63	Interview	27-07-15	Op_Lead5	55	Male	Segur
64	Interview	29-07-15	Op_Lead6	51	Male	Debre Tabor
65	Interview	29-07-15	Op_Lead7	48	Male	Debre Tabor

### **APPENDIX III: Field Notes**

<b>Field Note</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>1</b>	20-06-15	Addis Ababa	Ethiopian daily life
<b>2</b>	22-06-15	Addis Ababa	Church ceremony
<b>3</b>	25-06-15	Addis Ababa	Early marriage & education
<b>4</b>	26-06-15	Addis Ababa	NGO cooperation
<b>5</b>	29-06-15	Debre Tabor	Observations on the road + First impressions
<b>6</b>	30-07-15	Debre Tabor	Meeting the interpreter + WCAT
<b>7</b>	01-07-15	Debre Tabor	Studied responses
<b>8</b>	02-07-15	Debre Tabor	Police attitudes + Overview
<b>9</b>	03-07-15	Debre Tabor	Girls FGD evaluated
<b>10</b>	04-07-15	Segur	Airplane
<b>11</b>	04-07-15	Segur	Married girls more silent
<b>12</b>	04-07-15	Segur	Chased with rocks
<b>13</b>	04-07-15	Segur	No FGDs anymore
<b>14</b>	06-07-15	Segur	Priests against EM?
<b>15</b>	09-07-15	Aringo	Marriage in the house
<b>16</b>	10-07-15	Debre Tabor	Religious rituals
<b>17</b>	13-07-15	Debre Tabor	No interpreter needed?
<b>18</b>	14-07-15	Debre Tabor	Ferengi! Ferengi!
<b>19</b>	14-07-15	Debre Tabor	Arrogant leader
<b>20</b>	17-07-15	Debre Tabor	Developmental Bible translated
<b>21</b>	17-07-15	Debre Tabor	‘The office’
<b>22</b>	19-07-15	Debre Tabor	Lost in translation?
<b>23</b>	19-07-15	Gentenha	Teacher’s position
<b>24</b>	19-07-15	Gentenha	Dangerous places
<b>25</b>	20-07-15	Segur	EM in official or customary law?
<b>26</b>	21-07-15	Debre Tabor	Selective targeting of <i>kebeles</i>
<b>27</b>	23-07-15	Debre Tabor	HTP, western or local?
<b>28</b>	25-07-15	Magendi	Difficult role of <i>militias</i>
<b>29</b>	26-07-15	Magendi	Enthusiastic participants
<b>30</b>	27-07-15	Segur	Only woman in the meeting
<b>31</b>	30-07-15	Debre Tabor	Same, same..
<b>32</b>	03-08-15	Debre Tabor	Women in the bus
<b>33</b>	05-08-15	Debre Tabor	Concluding ideas

## ***APPENDIX IV: Research Activities***

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
18-6-2015	Amsterdam – Addis Ababa	- Arrival in Addis Ababa	
22-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Attend a church ceremony	- Observations
24-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Made contact with DEC	
25-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Visit to DEC-office	- Informal talks about early marriage in Amhara Region
26-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Visit to DEC-office	- Informal talks about NGOs and their cooperation
27-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Visit to DEC-office	- 2 Policy documents
28-6-2015	Addis Ababa	- Prepare for going into the field	
29-6-2015	Addis Ababa – Debre Tabor	- Travelling	
30-6-2015		- Made contact with interpreter	- Checked Interview Guides
1-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Attend Training Day on EM	- 7 Interviews with girls - 1 Interview with caregiver
2-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Visit to Police Station - Visit Public Persecution Office - Visit Women Speaker Office	- 2 Interviews with law enforcers - 1 Interview with NGO-worker
3-7-2015	Segur Kebele & Riyu Aparagay	- Visit Primary School in Segur - Visit Primary School in Riyu Aparaguay	- 3 Interviews with teachers - 5 Interviews with girls - 1 Interview with caregiver - 1 FGD with girls
4-7-2015	Segur Kebele	- Visit Church in Segur	- 1 FGD with priests
6-7-2015	Segur Kebele	- Visit Church in Segur	- 2 Interviews with priests - 1 Interview with caregiver
7-7-2015	Talda Kebele	- Visit Talda Kebele	- 1 Interview with caregiver
9-7-2015	Aringo Kebele	- Visit Aringo Kebele School	- 5 Interviews with girls - 2 Interviews with caregivers
10-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Visit a church and meeting afterwards	- 2 Observations
13-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Appointment with NGO Chadith	- 1 Interview with a NGO worker
14-7-2015	Debre Tabor & Segur Kebele	- Visit Regional Church Office & Attend Village Meeting	- 3 Interviews with religious leaders - 2 Interviews with opinion leaders - 3 Interviews with caregivers
15-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Appointment with Care International	-1 Interview with NGO worker -3 Policy documents
16-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Pick up Bible at Church	- Document ‘Developmental

		Office	Bible'
17-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Visit WCAT office	-Informal talks about EM prevention
19-7-2015	Gentenha Kebele	- Visit Gentenha Kebele	- 3 Interviews with girls - 1 Interview with a teacher - - 1 Interview with a religious leader
20-7-2015	Segur Kebele	- Visit Segur Kebele	-Informal observations
21-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Appointment with WCAT	- 1 Interview with a NGO worker - 2 Policy documents
22-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Walk around in Debre Tabor	- 1 Interview with a teacher
25-7-2015	Magendi Kebele	- Visit Magendi Kebele	- 3 Interviews with religious leaders - 1 Interview with an opinion leader
26-7-2015	Magendi Kebele	- Visit Magendi Kebele	- 2 Interviews with law enforcers - 6 Interviews with caregivers
27-7-2015	Segur Kebele	- Attend a village meeting	- 2 Interviews with opinion leaders
29-7-2015	Debre Tabor	- Attend ant EM-prevention meeting	- 2 Interviews with opinion leaders
8-8-2015	Debre Tabor – Addis Ababa	- Leave the field	