

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN NIGER

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Introduction

Child marriage is usually defined as a marriage of one or both spouses are below the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2012). UNICEF defines child marriage as a formal or informal union before the age of 18. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that affect not only individuals but also the society at large. Child marriage often happens in the shadows of poverty and gender inequality, hindering efforts to enable girls and boys to achieve long-term, sustainable development. It is both an indication and a cause of ongoing development challenges, as the practice of child marriage contributes to economic deprivation, human rights violations, denial of educational aspiration, and health care needs of children. Ending child marriage is not an easy task. For a better understanding, the problem needs to be assessed in its broader context.

The child marriage has been practiced for very long and in a variety of cultural contexts. As a concern, it persists because of numerous factors such as the socio-cultural norms, inter family relationship, political and economic factors. One might ask why child marriage? Why must it stop? The answer is simple in theory but difficult in practice. Child marriage must end because it is a violation of human and child rights. When a child is married (mostly girls), her rights to education, health, reproductive and sexual are being violated and often, prevents the girls from attaining them. Again, a married child may be subjected to all sorts of abuses or/and violence, because in such conditions, the child protection is surely uncertain. In addition, when a child from a poor family is married, the cycle of poverty might repeat itself. Child marriage is also a problem of gender inequality because it affects females differentially.

Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the whole worldwide. Plan International Niger (PIN), in collaboration with other western and local partners, decided to address the

phenomenon and hopefully bring it to an end. According to Plan International Niger, the NGO will be working closely with key partners such as Plan Belgium, UNFPA, UNICEF, Plan Suisse and grass root organizations to tackle the problem. In the context of Niger, child marriage needs to be addressed with both diversified and indirect approaches to avoid any clash with rebellious or recalcitrant group extremists that might influence the debate and other social norms and values that might be affected.

This project surely will stimulate fundamental changes to key role players at the community and national level in terms of outcomes of the activities. This proposal will be implemented in Dosso and Tillabery regions, both located in the western part of Niger (see map). Depending on the success of the two pilot regions, the project might be extended to other regions presenting which exhibits high rate of child marriage.

Background

Child marriage is a global concern that affect mostly women. According to UNICEF, globally, more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. More than one female in three girls entered into union before age 15 (UNICEF, 2013). Boys are also married as children, but girls are unreasonably affected. For example in Niger, 77 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 were married before age 18 in contrast to 5 per cent of men in the same age group (UNPFA, 2012). Child marriage has become an unease situation to the International Community. Various international non-governmental organizations have already tackled or worked on the ways to end child marriage. As for this section, much of the information were taking from UNICEF and UNFPA.

Niger's law states that the legal age of marriage is 15 for a girl and 18 for a boy; however, this is poorly respected. Most marriages are done according to custom, proceed without the spouses' consent, and are never registered. As young as they are, girls often don't realized what actually is happening to them until when they are informed that they cannot go to school anymore because they were given into marriage, sometimes to older men, who they don't even know. According to PIN, in the Dosso region, the age of girls being forced to marry can be as low as 9 years. Girls pressed into marriage in most cases become pregnant during the adolescent age, which increases the risk of pregnancy complications during child birth. These are the leading cause of death among teenagers in developing countries.

PIN's work to end child marriage has shown that the persistence of the practice of child marriage is based on customary practices of exploitation of girls and a vision inherently uneven

and therefore discriminatory to women and girls in Niger. Recognizing that the struggle to end child marriage entails a joint effort, PIN in partnership with international organizations supports the agents of change at the community, local, and national levels to make a behavioral change in attitude and the incentives that led to the practice of child marriage. In this joint effort, children, the most vulnerable group, are also involved in the struggle to educate peers to end child marriage and the reasons why it should not be done.

Country profile:



Source:DHS, 2006

Niger, located in the Africa, south of the Sahara, a low- income, landlocked Country. Niger shares its borders with seven African nations (see map). Niger covers an area of 1,267,000 sq. km with more than half of the land occupied by the Sahara desert. It has a population 18.53 million (World Bank, 2014) with a growth rate of 3.3% (Institut National de la Statistique, 2010). In the last Human Development index, Niger has been ranked 187 out of 187 countries. Islam is the predominant religion in Niger. It was a former French colony which gained its independence in 1960. The main activity is the agriculture. It has a very dry climate and recurrent natural hazards such as drought, flood, and food shortage, make it difficult to provide sufficient provision for its population. The economy relies predominantly on the crops, livestock, and a large deposit of uranium.

Niger has the highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world. On average, three out of four girls will be married before their 18th birthday. In 2006, 75 percent of the women age 20-24 were in union before age 18 compare to 1998 (77%) Percent. While child marriage is very common in Niger, its prevalence is highest in south Niger, specifically, Diffa Region (89%), Zinder Region (88%), Maradi Region (87%) and Tahoua Region(83%), followed by Dosso Region (74%), Tillaberi Region (69%), Agadez Region (48%), and Niamey Region (28%). Child marriage prevalence in Niger is significantly higher than the regional average for sub-Saharan Africa (37%). Once girls in Niger are married, very few of them use contraception in spite of their needs to space their childbearing time. The fertility rate is also the highest in the world with 7.6 children/ woman. More than half of Niger population is under age 18. Maternal mortality rate is 535/1000 and infant mortality is about 51/1000 births. In term of girls' school attendance, 4 out of 10 do not go to school and 8 out of 10 women are illiterate (UNFPA, 2012). These extraordinary numbers highlight the significance of the child marriage issue in Niger.

The judiciary context with regards to child protection

According to PIN, Niger has ratified many international and regional agreement regarding child protection such the Convention on the Right of the Child (ratified in 1990), African charter on the rights and welfare of the child (1996), the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1999) etc.

At national level, the Nigerien Constitution acknowledges and states its punitive measures for violence against women and children in both private and public places and that in marriage, consent from both parties is required; otherwise, parties will face charges. Despites the

internal protection framework such as the penal code, the National Policy on Gender 2008, the civil rights code etc. children in Niger are exposed to all sort of abuse (e.g., child marriage).

Problem statement

Child marriage is defined by UNICEF as “a formal marriage or informal union before age 18” and happens all over the world. Forced into marriage without giving consent violates the basic human rights of both boys and girls. One out of three girls in the developing countries are married before the 18th birthday (USAID, 2013). The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in numerous international conventions and declarations including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the understanding that consent cannot be “free and full” when one of the parties is not mature enough to make an informed decision about a life partner (USAID, 2013).

UNICEF (2013) and USAID (2013) present the best available documents concerning child marriage. Because of the availability of materials on the problem, my proposal seeks to follow the prescriptions and recommendations of these donors’ organizations very closely in order to alleviate the issue. In doing so, the problem statement and the argument were taken primarily from the two sources mentioned above.

Regardless of efforts in these and other conventions to discourage child marriage, national legal frameworks sometimes violate international norms by treating females and males differently. For example, in Niger, where it is estimated that 75% of marriages fall under the category of child marriage, 15 is the permissible age of marriage for boys and 18 for girls. Cultural and socioeconomic conditions, poverty, and lack of access to education also influence whether a girl is married early. Child marriage is most common in the world’s poorest countries

and among the poorest households. Girls from poor households are more likely to get married before the age of 18 compare to those from wealthy families (Plan International, 2015).

The consequences of child marriage are severe as it affect the maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality. All these have a repercussion and negatively affect not only the children but also the entire society. Once married, the child brides are more likely to get pregnant, which often will end with pregnancy related complications because their bodies are not yet well developed. Consequently, the result frequently ends in maternal and infant morbidity as complication might arise during childbirth with high risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Girls are often forced to drop out of school, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Child marriage is also associated with human trafficking as it increases the vulnerability of children to being trafficked or re-trafficked. In some cases, girls are forced into prostitution or exploitative labor situations by their spouse or spouse's family, while in other cases children may become easy prey for traffickers when they attempt to flee their marital home as a result of abuse.

Project Proposal

Ending child marriage is not only the right thing to do; it can also pay enormous dividends for development. Delaying marriage and childbearing can improve the health of a mother and her child. Increasing the age of first marriage reduces girls' risk for physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Delaying marriage can also increase girls' and women's decision-making ability. Keeping girls in school and delaying marriage increases incomes for individuals and advances economic development for countries. Girls who delayed marriage are more likely to invest in their families and children. When girls stay in school, communities and families will all benefit; three such ways are reducing infant mortality, increasing maternal health, and decreasing the risk of HIV. More importantly, when a girls are spared of the early marriage phenomenon, they are likely to be educated. In this regard, they can take their fate in hand by deciding whom to marry and determining on the desired family size.

Key strategies

The project will mainly focus on the local level where one of the best strategies is the prolonged education of girls at school. Some other strategies have been developed that can complement the actions (see below) supported by the local organizations as key actors that can bring about change in the society regarding child marriage.

Youth level: empowerment and behavioral change

- Encourage youth club creation that can keep girls and boys informed, trained on reproductive rights and life skills

- Help girls own small businesses and activities that can generate revenue, and participate in the micro credit activities
- Peer to peer support

At the family level: support youth and behavioral change

- Maintain dialogue between children and their parents
- Increase parents knowledge and understanding of child protection, child marriage, and child rights/girls' rights.

At the community level: creation of safe environment for girls

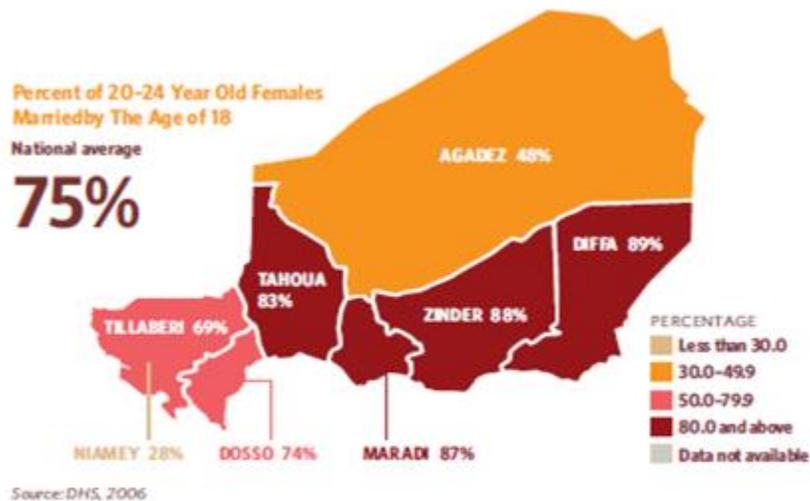
- Mobilize community leaders to highlight girls protection from traditional and customs practices
- Improve the communities' mechanism on child protection by developing for example a national policy framework on community protection, define and codify appropriate roles for community members, establish and strengthen referral networks and national capacity building programs etc.
- Introduce some mechanisms of denunciations (such as obligation to report for all members of the community, channels that allow children to report risky behavior, toll free hotline and a legislation to protect people reporting) and referral of cases of child abuse, child marriage to health services, justice, and child protection departments
- Socio economic reintegration of girls' victims' of the practice (eg. Fistula girls)
- Sensitize people for marriage registrations

Stakeholders: reinforce child protection policies and advocacy

- Improve child protection mechanism in schools and within the communities by reinforcing the existing child protection policies
- Support marriage registrations
- Advocate for a policy that specifically protects and promotes girls' rights

Activities

The pilot will be conducted in Dosso and Tillabery in the western part of Niger. The choice of these two locations is justified because the Country Office of Plan International Niger is located in Niamey and for an easy access to the field, the two selected regions are both within one to two hours away from the main office. Secondly, PIN has been intervening in these regions in different aspects of development for more than a decade. This presence, gives the organization more trust and confidence to explore more ways to better the lives of vulnerable population (girls and women) in its area of intervention. And lastly, the prevalence of child marriage in the selected localities are definitely high. According to PIN, Dosso and Tillabery have respectively 74% and 69% of female married by the age of 18. Depending on the success of the selected regions, the project might be expended to other six regions of Niger.



This project is targeting 510 adolescents in twenty villages of Dosso and Tillabery including 360 girls and 150 boys. By the end of the project, girls, as main victims and survivors of child marriage, would have been trained and empowered in order to be able to speak out against the practice.

- ✓ Training youth groups and key stakeholders, including school government, judiciary, Police and social workers on girls' rights, child marriage and reproductive health
- ✓ Setting up a reporting system in schools and within the communities
- ✓ Awareness activities related to child marriage conducted by youth groups
- ✓ Training women's groups on the risks and consequences related to child marriage
- ✓ Advocacy and dissemination

The training will involve training of trainees (ToT). The staff of PIN and other partners will provide training to the project team on the safeguard mechanism of child marriage, which will be replicated to train girls on the consequences of the practice. Training module will include life skills (fundraising initiatives to keep girls in school, activities generating revenue), sexual and reproductive health, problem solving, decision making ability, child protection and inclusion. This training sessions will include club formation of children and school governments so that they can educate their peers about the effects of child marriage and develop a reporting mechanism to alert stakeholders in the cases of violations. In addition, the communities will also be trained to better understand the risks behind child marriage. This list would include religious leaders, parents, and law enforcement officers (police, stakeholders and judiciaries etc.).

Project Implementation

In seeking to end child marriage, the project will be implemented by PIN, which will assume responsibility for the scale up at the regional level with the support of the government of Niger, local Non-Governmental Organizations with the input of juvenile judge, child organizations/associations **to end child marriage for at least 510 adolescents in Dosso and Tillabery regions**. Plan's assessment of the communities in selected regions and the mobilization of opinion leaders toward ending child marriage was very meaningful. This project will produce strategies for practical options to end child marriage. It will focus on involving girls and boys, communities, families and opinion leaders with the goal of ending child marriage.

Additionally, the project will promote girls' empowerment in various ways (economic, social, and political) that allow them speak out against child marriage. One and most important way is to keep girls at school.

- ✓ Lobby the Niger government to make primary education mandatory.
- ✓ Involve more female teachers as role models
- ✓ Persuade parents to keep their daughters in school
- ✓ Build schools closer to the communities

Another way of empowering girls is to provide a second chance to victims of child marriage and those who did not get the opportunity to go to school by providing them of life skill and activities generating revenue, training on small scale businesses, and the participation in micro credit activities.

- ✓ Sewing
- ✓ Dying cloth

- ✓ Food processing and selling etc.

Methods of implementing include training of young girls and boys, traditional and religious leaders, parents on the consequences of child marriage, child rights and protection, and on gender based violence. The project will first focus on training trainers and then, follow by the peer education. A workshop will be conducted to train the trainers, who will train and sensitize the members of the community for a better understanding of the reasons why child marriage must end. Despite all these mentioned above, the project will also focus its efforts on advocating for the strengthening of the existing laws and their strict applications and the adoption towards the delaying of age at first marriage.

In terms of perspectives for an achievable result, PIN, through this project, seeks to

- ✓ Mobilizing a six (6) awareness raising programs at the communities level
- ✓ Promoting behavioral change program at the communities level by advocacy messages to remove barriers and to participate to services provided to gain relevant skills to make the change easier and possible
- ✓ Eight modules (8) and four (4) workshops will be carried out for young girls and the victims of child marriage (sewing, gardening, and food processing etc)
- ✓ Increasing competence and confidence in girls and boys that can help them decide for themselves, take their fate in hand for a positive behavioral changes within the targeted communities by reducing the incidence of child abuse. An investigation will carried out to identify ways of raising boys and girls engagement
- ✓ Strengthening the existing institutionalized policy that set the age at marriage with a reform on child protection system through the production of a national standard operating

document for child protection in Niger and establish corrective measures against recalcitrant.

The purpose of these training sessions and workshops is to empower girls with life skills (sexual and reproductive health, managing small finances, and revenue generating activities, etc.).

Overall, the goal of the effort is **to end child marriage in Niger by 2025** with the aim to ensure that there is a system in place to prevent and respond to violence against children.

PIN has done a remarkable impact in tackling the issue of child marriage in prior efforts. The best practices, (such as the reporting systems, communication for behavioral change, trainings, knowledge gained on gender based violence, and advocacy etc.), will be utilized to achieve a successful result for the current project. Girls' education seems to be the most powerful tool to eradicate child marriage and other harmful traditional practices that endanger girls' life such as Obstetrical fistula, pregnancy related complications (maternal mortality, infant and child mortality, and repeated cycle of poverty). The staff and the communities where PIN works (Dosso and Tillabery etc.) have the local knowledge and expertise of working together for more than a decade in the area of child marriage, education, health, environment etc. PIN initiated the whistle blowing policy to detect hidden cases of child marriage and any form of child abuse in those regions. It is a child protection policy that Plan International undertakes to protect children ensuring that no child is subject to child abuse as a result of their association with Plan Staff, Plan Associates and Plan Visitors and/or their participation in any Plan activity, including the projects and programs. So, the main strategy is to engage parents, religious and traditional leaders, boys and girls, members of law enforcements and judiciaries in a collaborative learning community on how to end child marriage in Niger.

Key Risks/limitations

Implementing such an effort is not without potential problems. Here are four of particular concern:

- Cultural barriers to behavioral change with regards to girl's rights and protection, and opportunities.
- Lack of job opportunities for school girls upon program completion
- The capability of the government of Niger to provide services in health and education sectors.
- Influence of porous borders.

Here, the border influence constitute a serious matter. Communities with a shared language and cultural, ethnic and religious values tend to practice cross borders marriages. In Niger for example, there is a huge influence of the north Nigeria rich men crossing the border to seek for underage girls to marry from poor home in exchange of material benefits. This is not an isolate case. It happens with almost all the countries that share border with Niger because, the frontier seems meaningless and artificial as they share the same cultures and values.

The project team will keep monitor the project throughout the project cycle to check on these negative influence. The monitoring and evaluation team will be assessing the risks regularly to avoid any jeopardy.

Timeline

This pilot project will be conducted in Dosso and Tillabery on a period of 24 months with a fiscal year starting from July to June. The project's life span is from July 2015 to June 2017. The timeline below reflect one fiscal year. The second year timeline will be similar with slight changes.

	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb	Mar	Apr.	May	June
Administrative setting up	Tasks											
Training & advocacy		TOT										
Training & advocacy			Community	police	Parents							
formation of school gov.&youth club				Boys and g	Mid year evaluation							
Fundraising activities												
reproductive rights training					consequences of c	Evaluation of result						
Sewing & food processing learning program												
Gardening program												
small scale micro finance	small businesses			Evalu	sewing				Evaluation of result			
Workshops												
Final project evaluation										dissemination of re		

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and staffing

After an overall assessment of the project feasibility, it is the time to set how to monitor and evaluate the project throughout its life time. The monitoring and the evaluation is significant for various reasons. First, due to the complexity of the theme, it requires a constant monitoring for a good coordination of the project. Second, it is important for future project implementation, and thirdly, because of the weak capacity of project management in Niger, a regular and constant follow up is necessary.

The monitoring and evaluation will be conducted by a team composed of a specialist in M&E that will be recruited under the supervision of the Monitoring and Evaluation and Research Manager (MER) of PIN, Gender and child protection Coordinator that will also work closely with the focal person of M&E, six Community Development Agents, and six community volunteers, will be dedicated to the project. Monitoring strategy that can track the indicators throughout the project's lifecycle will be developed. The project as a whole, will be monitored closely by the Country Management Team (CMT) of PIN and its partners, through quarterly reports, quarterly implementation reviews, technical reports, meetings and regular technical supervision missions fielded as required to enhance success under the leadership of the Country Director (CD).

In term of capacity building, training session will be provided to four trainers, who will provide training to the beneficiaries: Girls and boys, parents and community religious and

traditional leaders, in life skill training, behavioral change, advocacy and the consequences of child marriage). The staff working on the project will also be trained on effective method of data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the result for a better sustainability.

- ✓ Four (4) trainers will be trained during the first two months of the project who will provide training to adolescent girls and the communities
- ✓ Twenty five (25) boys and girls will be trained during the project life time in each of the twenty (20) villages of the selected two regions in various activities.
- ✓ Seventeen (17) girls in each of the twenty villages will be empowered by the end of the project.

Collection of data: the community volunteers will be constantly on the field as they are members of the communities, to collect data and also, to be the informants of cases of recalcitrant practices of child marriage. The CDA also collect data through interviews, focus group discussion (FGD) etc. The data is collected both qualitatively and quantitatively. The latter will allow the team to determine whether the perception people in the communities is changing towards the issue of child marriage.

- Routine weekly reporting and updating
- Reliable collection and management of the data so it can be efficiently be analyzed and used as information (surveys, face to face interview, FGD etc.)
- Monthly progress report
- Monthly meetings,
- Draw on existing data

Communication with Sponsors

Communication and coordination with sponsor constitute the interaction with the donor. A communication schedule will be established, and the responsibilities of each participant will be identified. See the timeline for exact dates of progress report, mid-semester presentations, final-presentations, Showcase, etc. Establish the form of communication (visits, weekly updates, conference calls, teleconferences). Specify who will receive information and how it will be transmitted and clearly state what actions are requested with each communication: information only, reply requested, etc.

Dissemination of Result

Evaluation of the project's success in achieving its outcomes will be monitored continuously throughout the project. A midterm evaluation of the project will be conducted and in term of performance of the staff, they will be evaluated every three month toward the achievement of their goals. This appraisal will assess each staff's input towards the achievement of the project's success. The community volunteers will be constantly on the field to coordinate the activities with members of the community for a proper follow up. A SWOT analysis (which stand for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat) will be carried out every quarter to help the project face its greatest challenges and the most promising tasks, and further to determine where and when a more in-depth assessment may be needed. In addition, at the end of the project, there will be a final evaluation and audit to assess how best the project achieved its intended objectives. This will be done internally and also with an external consultant for a fair collaboration and quality assessment with the donors. In a well collaborative manner, there will a workshop will gather all the people, organizations and associations involve in the fight against

child marriage to disseminate the result, and the deliverables (best practices and lesson learnt throughout the project cycle to relevant stakeholders and partners (institutions, organizations, and individuals etc.) for future usage. Next, comes the project exiting strategy to ensure the sustainability of the project's outputs that can further educate, inform, and engage etc. and lastly, organize a farewell get together to acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of the staff, partners and donors.

Budget

Categories	FY 15-16	FY16-17	FY15-17
Personnel (salaries)			
Gender Coordinator	18000	18000	36000
M&E specialist	19800	19800	39600
CDA	7200	7200	14400
Trainers (4)	12000	12000	24000
Community Volunteers (6)	3600*6=21600	3600*6=21600	43200
Facilities			
Workshops	7000	4000	12000
Office running cost	17000	17000	34000
Rent	15000	15000	30000
supplies	8000	8000	16000
Administrative cost			
Insurance	50000	50000	100000
Medical Coverage	10000	10000	20000

Supplies	8000	8000	16000
Equipment			
Sewing machines	6500	3000 maintenance	9500
Gardening tools	3500	1000 maintenance	45000
Motors (6)	12000	5000 maintenance	17000
Vehicles (2)	30000	8000 maintenance	38000
Miscellaneous	9000	11000	20000
Grand Total	254600	218600	473200

Acronyms

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

PIN: Plan International Niger

CD: Country Director

MER Monitoring, Evaluation and Research

CMT: Country Management Team

PSM: Program Support Manager

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

CDA: Community Development Agent

FGD: Focus Group Discuss

SWOT: Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats

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