

## Validation Workshop on Linking and Learning Existing Early Marriage Research



The Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (ESSWA) in partnership with Plan International Ethiopia (PIE) has been conducting a research on prevalence and drivers of early marriage in three hotspot woredas of Amhara, Oromia and SNNP regional states. The research has identified ‘what worked well’ and ‘what not’ in tackling early marriage in Ethiopia. Ultimately, this will help to scale up existing ‘good practices’ by linking existing initiatives, which is also believed to stimulate collaboration among various actors and to increase the impact of interventions in the country.

ESSWA in collaboration with PIE held a one-day national validation workshop on June 13, 2017, at Azzeman Hotel, Addis Ababa. The objectives of the workshop were to share the draft EM key research findings and validate the same for programmatic and policy recommendations. The workshop brought together about **41 (15 female)** experts from ‘National Alliance Members to End Early Marriage’, as well as concerned government and civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, development partners, ESSWA members and representatives of other relevant stakeholders.

The workshop was started exactly at 9:00 am with the introductory speech by Ato. Zelalem Anteneh, Executive Director of ESSWA. He welcomed all participants and commended the high turnout of the Workshop. He introduced the personalities, who were billed to speak, present and moderate the entire sessions. Then Ato. Zelalem invited W/ro Martha Yigezu, Early

Marriage Fund Secretariat Manger (PIE) to make an opening remark. She paid tribute to ESSSWA for making this research outputs real. She also extended her gratitude to all researchers mainly for Dr. Melese Getu, Dr. Gudaye Emirie, DrKassahun and others at the back of this work. W/ro Martha also delivered a short message about the early marriage fund. She mentioned about the nature of EM fund and how the selection process was highly competitive among many applicant organizations. She also highlighted the three main strategic areas of EM fund, such as: the learning aspect, linking and accelerating of the existing efforts in the country. Finally, she indicated that this ESSSWA's project is delivered in the first phase and will continue until 2018.

### **Presentation on the findings of the study**

The presentation and discussion sessions were chaired by Dr. Abeje Berihanu, associate professor of AAU. Dr. Abeje, introduced the presentation pattern by the three presenters, he then invited Dr. Melese Getu to do the first presentation.

Dr. Melese started by the introduction part of the research report. He mentioned the limitations of statistical data or literature with clear picture of the problem in an intergenerational manner. Then he gave an insight into the prevalence of the early marriage in Ethiopia. He also discussed the objective of the study, different methodologies used, various literature consulted, research sites and ethical considerations.

Furthermore Dr. Melese has also presented the factors that drive early marriage across the research sites. The factors are divided into three categories such as Social Norms, Economic and Institutional factors. Some of the social norms mentioned as drivers of early marriage are: stigma directed at unmarried girls, hosting wedding feast, social norm reinforcement by religious leaders, polygyny, and low value for girls and adolescent girls' choice to marry their 'first love'. Among the economic factors, economic dependent of girls, income poverty, bride wealth and gifts mentioned as drivers of early marriage. Absence of secondary and preparatory

schools, lack of employment opportunities, perception towards women and girls are also listed as institutional factors that drive early marriage in the research sites.

The second presentation was made by Dr. Kassahun. He has presented deep quantitative description on the prevalence, trend and drivers of early marriage in the three research sites. He described the respondents profile in detail, the prevalence and trend of EM, factors associated with EM and drivers of EM among the three selected woredas.

The last, but not the least, presentation was made by Dr. Guaye Emerie. She has presented the qualitative aspect of the research findings mainly focusing on the protective factors, challenges and lesson learned. Dr. Guday mentioned Education (improve access to education and school-based supportive services), fear of legal sanctions, presence of local role models and supportive male relatives as the most significant protective factors of early marriage in the study sites. She substantiated her presentation by presenting very interesting cases from the research sites for instance the case of Abebech from Shebedino wereda.

Dr. Guday also presented the best practices (lesson learned) in fighting against HTPS in the three woredas. For instance ***'the Black Flag Campaign'*** from Fagita-Lekoma wereda in Amhara Region; ***'Community Declaration'*** from Diksis wereda in Oromia Region and ***'Awarding Best Performing Female Students'*** from Shebedino wereda in SNNP. Finally, she mentioned the major challenges of EM such as school dropout, teenage marriage by consent, challenges related to linking and coordinating early marriage program, hidden EM arrangements, legal awareness and law enforcement, difficulty in changing social norms and other NGO related challenges.

### **Comments, Questions and Suggestions Emanating from the Workshop Presentations**

Following the three presentations, two round discussions have been made on the research findings, participants have reflected on various methodological, factual and validation issues for each to be taken home to enrich shared research findings. Some of the most important comments, questions and suggestions raised during the validation workshop were:

- Legal enforcement is mentioned as a protective factor of early marriage, but legal enforcement bodies should be mentioned boldly as a major bottleneck of EM in the country.
- Marriage of 'first love' is mentioned in the quotations in the research findings, but it is illegal in country for those children under the age of 18 even if it is based on the consent of the couples. Therefore, we should see the legal aspect as well.
- When we talk about EM, the study has to see the symptom of power and gender relationship. EM cannot be seen as a standalone issue, it has to be seen from different perspectives like, law, religion, family, economy, health, education etc...
- In the presentation lack role model is mentioned BY Dr. Melese as a cause for the EM, on the other way Dr. Guday mentioned the presence of role model as a protective factor. Wouldn't be a contradiction?
- Some very interesting good practices have been mentioned in the report, How do we scale up these best practices to the other areas?What are recommendations emanated from the community or study participants to address EM?
- The reports show the prevalence clearly, but I couldn't see the incidence or the current situation of the problem, do you have data that shows the current incidence of EM in the research sites?
- Best practices are presented in the findings, but most of the best practices are associated with project based intervention areas, how do you control project intervention biases?
- Limitation of statistical data and literature is mentioned as a problem, but as far as I know there are different data sources available in the country, have you tried to consult the available literatures?
- There are many intervention works in Amhara region on EM, but the problem still exists. Why are the reasons for this?
- Various reasons have been indicated as cause of EM, how do you see the importance of communication strategy in reducing the problem?

- In the findings first love marriage is indicated as a problem, in connection with this many young girls exposed to various problems such as pregnancy, STD, etc, but nothing has been said about family planning education. How do you see the importance of Family planning education the study sites?
- The solution for EM should come from the community themselves, any intervention projects should follow participatory approach which directly involving the victims. Sense of ownership must be developed. It is not only best female performing students should be awarded rather we should award or encourage progressive female student as well. It is also very important to work closely with religious and community leaders to reduce the problem. Using government structure also could be the best option to address the problem.
- Lack of unemployment is indicated as a driver for EM, but from legal point view it is not allowed to be formally employed under the country's labour law. Doesn't this contradict?
- How does the study tried to accommodate the different social and gender norms among different cultures?
- How do you consider the psycho-social impact of the case of Abebech in Shebedino werda?
- The study doesn't show methodologically cross sectional data. Does the study focus only the target group or tried to see the differences in different cultural clusters? Have you tried to see the problem of natural disaster as a driver of EM in the study?
- Does this study have a clear research questions or hypothesis to address the issue?
- What does this study recommends for policy makers, PIE and others
- How do you see the conceptual use of early marriage, child marriage, or forced marriage?

All presenters have reacted to the questions raised by the participants and accepted the comments which are relevant for enriching the report. Finally, the closing remark was made by Ato Zelalem Anteneh, ESSSSWA's Executive Director. He thanked all the presenters and participants for attending the validation workshop. With this the event has come to an end.