

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE CHANGING AND HIDDEN ASPECTS OF EARLY MARRIAGE  
ARRANGMENTS AMONG THE PEASANT COMMUNITIES OF AMHARA  
REGION: THE CASE OF FOGERA WOREDA, SOUTH GONDAR, NORTH  
WESTERN ETHIOPIA**

**By: ESHETU EWNETU**



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**MA THESIS**

**ON**

**THE CHANGING AND HIDDEN ASPECTS OF EARLY MARRIAGE ARRANGMENTS AMONG THE PEASANT COMMUNITIES OF AMHARA REGION: THE CASE OF FOGERA WOREDA, SOUTH GONDAR, NORTH WESTERN ETHIOPIA**

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**Submitted to: The School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in Social Anthropology**

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*DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY*

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## ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
ACPF	African Child Policy Forum
ANRS	Amhara National Regional State
ANRSWAO	Amhara National Regional State Women's Affairs Office
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
E.C	Ethiopian Calendar
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EWLA	Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FMLSA	the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
FMRWG	Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls
FWAO	Fogera <i>Woreda</i> Administrative Office
FWARDO	Fogera <i>Woreda</i> Agricultural and Rural Development Office
FWJO	Fogera <i>Woreda</i> Justice Office
FWWAO	Fogera <i>Woreda</i> Women's Affairs Office
GC	Gregorian Calendar
GOs	Governmental Organizations
IAC	Inter-African Committee
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
ILO	International Labor Organization
ILRI	The International Livestock Research Institute
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education

MoWA	Ministry of Women’s Affairs
NCTPE	National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OAU	Organization of African Union
PA(s)	Peasant Association(s)
SCD	Save the Children Denmark - Ethiopia
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
STD’s	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
TVET	Technical Vocational Education Training
UDHR’s	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization
W/ro	<i>Wäyzäro</i>

## GLOSSARY

<i>abäləğ</i>	fictive-kinship relationship established through god-parenthood and childhood
<i>agoza</i>	spread for seats
<i>akmada</i>	leather bag for grain transport
<i>araš</i>	farm servant
<i>aräqi</i>	distilled liquor
<i>bərr</i>	the currency unit of Ethiopia
<i>bälg</i>	Short or little rains season (late February to end of May/early June)
<i>bärät</i>	cattle kraal
<i>bäqlo</i>	mule, also used to refer to an “infertile woman”
<i>bet</i>	homestead, home, house
<i>däbər</i>	church, monastery
<i>Däbo/ wänfäl</i>	a mutual labor agreement whereby two or more individuals work together on each others’ plots for an equal amount of time
<i>dähəna adärkə</i>	good morning
<i>dähəna arefädkə</i>	good afternoons
<i>Däga</i>	Highland ecological zone which refers to areas above 2,200 meters above sea level.
<i>dəggəs</i>	feast, banquet
<i>dəha</i>	poor
<i>gabəčča</i>	marriage
<i>derg</i>	The name of Military Government which administered Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991
<i>fasika</i>	Easter
<i>gebere mahber</i>	Peasant Associations
<i>genna</i>	Christmas
<i>gəṭəgəṭə</i>	A pre-wedding feast among the marrying families
<i>goğğo</i>	A traditional small round hut made of wood, mud and grass or a small house with a thatched roof

<i>guaya</i>	Grass pea, <i>Lathyrus sativus</i> L.
<i>qomo qär</i>	unmarriageable
<i>goṭṭ</i>	perish, locally used administrative entity below the sub- <i>kebele</i> (not part of the formal government administrative structure).
<i>gult</i>	conditional land rights to the tribute and corvee labor due from the peasant on a certain plot of land
<i>habt</i>	wealth, property, possession
<i>idir</i>	is traditional community based insurance scheme in which a household head contributes a predetermined amount of money to the membership in order to be insulated from cash shortfalls in the event of death of a specified member of his family or himself
<i>jendi</i>	bed sheet
<i>krästanna</i>	infant baptism, male infants are baptized forty days after birth and female infants eighty days after birth
<i>kenber</i>	yoke
<i>kess</i>	priest
<i>lamenet</i>	spread used both for seats and as a bed sheet
<i>maresha</i>	plough head
<i>mahäbär</i>	An association in which a group of people organize monthly feasts in the name of a particular patron saint in turn. Besides its religious functions, <i>mahber</i> is an association for mutual aid
<i>meher</i>	The main rainy season - in most places from June to mid-September. Crops sown during this period are harvested from October to December
<i>mel's</i>	a return visit of the bride to her parents- usually 10 days after the wedding day
<i>mechanya</i>	rope
<i>matäbä bis</i>	one who does things unbecoming a Christian, untrustworthy person
<i>matäbä yälläš</i>	Non Orthodox Christian
<i>mekenajo</i>	An arrangement for sharing oxen in which two farmers with an ox each team up and work their holdings in turn

<i>meskel</i>	the day for the commemoration of the founding of the True Cross
<i>mize</i>	best-man upon the wedding day
<i>mofär</i>	plough beam
<i>noug</i>	oil crop
<i>qäbäle</i>	the smallest administrative unit in town or rural areas
<i>qolla</i>	hot lowland ecological zone
<i>qomo qär</i>	“unmarriageable” and “unwanted”, a stigma referring to a girl who remained unmarried after the socially stated and expected “age of marriage”
<i>rist/räst</i>	A form of land holding based on descent groups.
<i>sämanya</i>	A normative form of marriage contract among Christians involving equality of contributions to household property and joint responsibilities for decision-making
<i>sänbäte</i>	A Sunday association which meets on the grounds of a church and members take turns in providing food and drinks
<i>särg</i>	wedding
<i>siso/sisoñña</i>	1/3, a sharecropping arrangement whereby all the costs of the inputs are borne by the renting peasant, and the landholder and the renter receive one third and two thirds of the harvest respectively
<i>šimgilina</i>	community based conflict resolution mechanism.
<i>šamagalločč</i>	those respected and knowledgeable community elders who handle the <i>Šimgilina</i> process. Their minimum number is 3.
<i>täzkär</i>	feast or banquet in commemoration of a dead person/relative
<i>ṭälla</i>	locally prepared beer
<i>teff</i>	<i>Eragrostis abyssinica</i> : millet-like cereal staple used for making <i>injera</i>
<i>təməqät</i>	Ethiopian Epiphany
<i>wäyna däga</i>	mid-highland ecological zone
<i>Wäyzäro/Weyzero</i>	Mrs., a married woman
<i>Woreda</i>	The second administrative unit above the <i>kebele</i> in the current administrative structure

<i>yäqorqoro bet</i>	a house made of wood and mud with tin-corrugated roof
<i>yä'aggär šəmagəllewäč</i>	council of elders
<i>yä'njera ləğ</i>	step children
<i>zəkər</i>	Feast or banquet in commemoration of saints.
<i>Zone</i>	The third tier of government in the administrative structure of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). This structure has not been explicitly recognized as an administrative structure in the Constitution

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## Abstract

*The overall objective of this study was to investigate the changing and hidden aspects of early marriage arrangements among the peasant communities of Fogera Woreda in South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State. More specifically, the study was aimed at exploring the nature of early marriage arrangements, identifying major reasons for early marriage and its hidden arrangement procedures, exploring the role of community based organizations in promoting the hidden arrangement procedures of early marriage, and identifying the role of local government institutions in preventing the current hidden arrangements of early marriage in the study area. To achieve these objectives both primary and secondary data sources were employed.*

*This study mainly relied on ethnographic data gathered through a combination of qualitative research methods such as key informant and in-depth personal interviews, focus group discussions, case studies and personal observation. The study participants were early married girls and women, parents, grand-parents, council of elders and knowledgeable individuals, religious leaders, local level government institutional leaders, health officers and Woreda officials. Finally, the data gathered through various sources were organized and analyzed thematically by using triangulation to increase the reliability and validity of the research findings.*

*Pertaining to the major findings of the study, the trend of early marriage arrangements among the studied peasant communities has changed from the public wedding feasts to the hidden ceremonies taking place in the name of social and religious gatherings and other events. Regarding the prevalence of the hidden arrangements of early marriage, the extended case studies, key informants as well as focus group discussants revealed that such mechanisms of early marriage arrangements are very common.*

*The study has also identified reasons for early marriage and its hidden arrangement procedures. The major reasons include: (1) economic factors related with parents' socio-economic status; (2) socio-cultural reasons such as parents' fear of their daughters' loss of virginity before marriage and related social stigmas, parents' fear of the qomo qär (being unmarriageable) stigma for their daughters, parents' desire to have a male guardian for their daughter and their desire to continue and extend their family line; (3) parents' lack of hope in formal education; and (4) female-headed heads' desire to get male protection and male labor force. The ethnographic data further revealed that currently early marriage arrangements are taking place in a hidden manner. Early marriage arranging parents and the early marriage facilitators try to disguise it through social, religious and other events because they are well aware of the illegality of the practice. The local community members also collaborate to hide the early marriage arrangements of other parents because they also want to arrange their daughters' marriage in the same way, which is the best option designed by the members of the local community since the formal laws forbid the practice.*

*This study concludes by suggesting the need for further study on the issue at hand with particular emphasis on how to fill the gap between socio-cultural values and economic realities of the rural peasant communities and the laws legislating against the practice in the Amhara National Regional State.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Birth, marriage and death are the rites of passage in most people's lives. But only one – marriage – is a matter of Choice (UNICEF, 2001:4) and consent between spouses should be “the corner stone of any marriage” (Guday, 2005:32). Marriage and the family are also universal and oldest institutions in which all societies recognized in some form or another (Opler, 1943; Outhwaite, 1981; Olson & DeFrain, 2000; Cherlin, 2002). The major function of marriage is primarily to regulate the need of sexual activity (Opler, 1943; Bohannan & Middleton, 1968; Outhwaite, 1981) and to process of procreation (Dominican, 1995). However, Holy (1996) argued that one can have sex without marriage, one cannot, or at least one is not expected, to have marriage without sex.

Marriage is a socially recognized and approved union between individuals, who could hand over to one another with the expectation of a stable and lasting intimate relationship. It begins with a ceremony known as a wedding, which is normally considered as a means of union for the marriage partners (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). It is also seen as the end goal of teenage romance and sex, a solemn and joyful assertion of custom and tradition, or a secure and respectable means of bringing up the next generation (Sweetman, 2003:2).

Consequently marriage looms are important in the life of a society, and thus merits so much anthropological attention, precisely because it is never merely an affair of kinship; it is never simply the execution of the rule but the strategy and logic whereby societies insure their future (LiPuma, 1983). Thus, marriage, it seems fair to say, can be known only in terms of the pragmatic interests whom people hold dear and the complex of conditions which shape their realization (ibid).

Some anthropologists emphasized that “first world” or “industrialized” societies are at variance from the rest because there is so little economic glue to hold the couples together. Here, romantic love is seen as a convenient contributor or prime factor of marriage (Pocs 1992:12). On the

contrary, in the “third world” countries, the case is so different and mainly based on the good will of the parents. In the case of Ethiopia, primarily in rural communities, arranged marriage, probably, early marriage considered as a normal way of carrying out social obligations (Alemante 2004:2).

For the deep understanding of any aspect of the social life of an African people, i.e. economic, political or religious, it is essential, mainly to anthropologists, to have knowledge of their system of kinship and marriage (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1970). Moreover, the institution of marriage is closely related to kinship and the family (Nwannobi, 1992) as well as that enables a child to have a socially recognized mother and father (Bohannan & Middleton, 1968; Nwannobi, 1992).

Throughout the literature reviews early marriage or “child” marriage is either one or both of the married couple being under the age of 18 years old. Thus, early marriage is the marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18. WHO defines adolescence as a period of gradual transition from childhood to adulthood as the age group ranging from 10–19. On this basis, any marriage before 18 will clearly be early marriage. Thus, both a girl and a boy is forced to marry in their teens or even pre-teens (Sweetman 2003) before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003). For that reason the primary focus of this study was to examine and analyze the changing and hidden pattern of early marriage in *Fogera Woreda* of South Gondar in Amhara National Regional State. Furthermore, even in those societies where early marriage is common, very few boys enter marriage compared to girls on their minor age and the consequences and the burden of responsibilities is much higher in girls than boys (UNICEF, 2001). As a result, this study examined the changing and hidden arrangement pattern of early marriage in relation to girls with reference to Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael Peasant Associations (PAs).

The study by the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE, 1997) in SCD, MoE & MoWA (2008) revealed that early marriage is practiced in Amhara (82%), Tigray (79%), Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella (64%). Furthermore, the similar survey report respondents revealed that 62% in Amhara, 53% in Tigray, 51% in Addis Ababa and 50% in Benishangul-Gumuz married before the age of 15. In addition, the Ethiopian Demographic and

Health Survey (2005) report in Pathfinder (2006) stated that 13% of girls in Ethiopia are married by the age of 15 and 66% of girls married before the age of 18.

Early marriage is a deep-rooted practice with a very high rate of occurrence mainly among the peasant communities of the north and central highlands (UNICEF, 2001). In line to this, the Amhara National Regional State Women's Affairs Office (ANRSWAO, 2003) in Guday (2005:44) stated that "early marriage is most common in the Amhara Region where the rate of urbanization is less than 9%".

In the Amhara Region, despite its "consequences, deep-rooted traditions compel families to continue the practice of early marriage" (Pathfinder 2006). There is also an old traditional concern that if a girl becomes too old for marriage, it will represent a failure on the part of her parents (ibid). Furthermore Heinonen (2002) in Guday (2005) argued that customs and traditions "can be understood as manmade doctrines, beliefs, practices, or stories that are passed from generation to generation, orally or by example". Sweetman (2003) explained the issue in relation to marriage by using Ethiopian proverb as 'A woman and an empty house are never alone for long.'

The study was carried out in Fogera *Woreda* of the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. It is located in the Northwestern part of the country and has 11 Administrative Zones; including South Gonder, where the study area is found. Accordingly, by taking different points in to consideration, the study was carried out in Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael Peasant Associations (PAs) of Fogera *Woreda* in South Gondar Zone.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Age at marriage is a significant factor in the lives of girls/women, mainly in their fertility and the status they get in the course of marriage. However, the practice of early marriage for girls without their will and free choice is a major means of parental empowerment of decisions on their life. Hence, the girls get the status and position of womanhood with marriage and childbearing at an early age, because unmarriedness is a "disgraceful and a humiliating act" (Pathfinder, 2006).

Early marriage has long been practiced in Ethiopia, mainly in Amhara Regional State and its highest prevalence is justified by certain surveys and national reports (e.g. UNICEF, 2001; Tilahun, 2005; Pathfinder, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; SCD, MoE & MoWA, 2008). There is, however, very little data on the practice in the region and there is no detailed data in the changing and hidden arrangement pattern of early marriage. Moreover, the arrangement and marriage processes in a specific areas sub merged in a national data without specific considerations, as the study of UNICEF (2001:17) explained “marriage at a very young age is more widespread than country data suggest”. Accordingly this study tried to specifically examine the hidden and changing arrangement pattern of early marriage in the two PAs of Fogera *Woreda*.

Even though the revised family law (2000) of the country asserted that the minimum age for first marriage is 18 years both for girls and boys, Ethiopia is among the forerunners to face the practice of early marriage globally. The Amhara Regional State is among the principal line at the national level and it is clearly a stronghold for the practice (SCD, MoE & MoWA, 2008). Moreover, the study of Inter-African Committee (1993) in UNICEF (2001) affirmed that early marriage in Ethiopia is “unavoidable part of life”. Early marriage is, therefore, a deep-rooted practice with a very high rate of occurrence mainly among the peasant communities of the north and central highlands (Tilahun, 2005). By the same token, Erulkar, et.al. (2004) acknowledged that in Amhara Region the most extreme forms of child marriage are practiced. While much of the arrangements and changing patterns of early marriage remain concealed millions of children and young people, particularly girls suffer negative consequences (UNICEF 2001) such as on education (Guday, 2005) and reproductive health problems (Alemante, 2004).

Even though studies or researches were carried out and conducted on the consequence of early marriage, none of them are conducted in the study area, and no study to date did deeply examine and disclose the hidden arrangement procedure of early marriage. Most of the researches and national surveys raised the issue of early marriage on the basis of its consequences. Moreover, they focus on the causes of early marriage in a quantitative approach. Thus, there is no as such empirical and qualitative study held in Fogera *Woreda* in relation to early marriage in general and the hidden and changing arrangements of it in particular. Accordingly, the researcher believes that it is better to understand a society in-depth than to see the causes generally. Moreover, most

of the previous researches viewed the practice of early marriage, both in the country and study area level, from the surface of its causes and consequences. Such studies do not reveal how and why early marriage is conducted by parents in a hidden way that it appears to be deceptive and unidentifiable for the executive body to impact the “illegal” actors of the practice.

Most of the researches in this area were carried out in quantitative analysis of data which mostly reveals the explicit nature and existence of early marriage. Concerned governmental bodies also focus on issues that are observed externally. Nevertheless, in most cases they overlook the on-goings than examining the in-depth circumstances of early marriage. Thus, they only present the mere existence of early marriage which could be punishable before the court of the law. Hence, people conduct it in a disguised manner since they are well aware that there would be some harm otherwise.

Another fact is that, most researchers do not realize how exactly marriage is viewed among the society in the study area in particular and in the Amhara Region in general. They also show reluctance over handling whether or not the justification given by the community members about early marriage is sensible. In most cases researches simply concentrate on the reality that daughters at an early age are being dragged into marriage. This, perhaps, could be done from the legal point of view of the country, which does prohibit marriage of girls under the age of 18. Moreover, most of the researches base their findings on the consequences of early marriage directly on the girls.

Consequently early marriage, mainly marrying off children before they reach the age of eighteen remains contentious. The major change which exists in the current situation is the hidden arrangement procedure of early marriage. However, the marriage does not appear apart from the previous socio-cultural context, values and norms. When it is viewed from its broader social and cultural context, it takes a different meaning, and local communities demonstrate a different understanding and do not necessarily consider it as a violation of the personal rights of girls/women. And hence the practice is a mechanism in the continuity of family line and maintenance of parental order.

This study, unlike other researches, focuses on exposing the justifications behind early marriage conducted in the study area. It also attempts to inspect the actual perception of this particular community in terms of the belief in performing early marriage despite the fact that it is banned by law. The other academic gap that could be filled in the course of this study could be the view that reveals why and how families organize early marriage in a hidden manner.

Therefore, the under-researched issue of the hidden and changing arrangements of early marriage in the study area in particular and in the country in general makes this study unique. Accordingly, this ethnographic study is believed to fill the aforementioned research gaps.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

The overall objective of this study was to investigate and examine the changing and hidden aspects of early marriage arrangements among the peasant communities of Amhara Region with particular emphasis on Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael Peasant Associations (PAs) in Fogera *Woreda* of South Gondar, Northwestern Ethiopia.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

The study has the following specific objectives:

- To explore the nature of early marriage arrangements in the study area.
- To identify major reasons for early marriage and its changing and hidden arrangement procedures among the peasant communities of the study area.
- To explore the role of community based organizations (CBOs) in promoting the hidden and changing arrangement procedures of early marriage.
- To identify the role of community and religious leaders and other community members in preventing the current hidden arrangements of early marriage in the study area.

## **1.4. Research Methodology**

This qualitative study was developed by the researcher in consultation with the research advisor and after reviewing the literature on early marriage in line with the research objectives of the study.

The study also used basic concepts and approaches of anthropological ethnography, as ethnography is defined as a culture studying culture. Accordingly, the participant observer comes to social situations with twofold purposes: to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation. Thus, a participant observer is “both insider and outsider simultaneously” (Spradley, 1980). Moreover, the researcher was, also in line with the principle of Spradley (1980) that participant observers formulate specific ethnographic questions and then ask themselves these questions thereby coming-up with answers from field notes or new observations or in many cases, after several periods of field investigation.

Thus, this study presented an analysis of data from research sites in Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs and through key informant and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The research instruments were designed at the initial stage, through stiff efforts with the advisor, and successfully implemented in the field with selected research participants. Most of the participants were females and informal interaction and learning of everything about their lives was tried to achieve in each moment of the field stay. Interview and focus group discussions were made based on the pre-prepared themes of interview and focus group guides (see Appendix 1 & 2). These themes were about the background information, the nature of early marriage, major reasons for early marriage arrangements and the role of CBOs and other institutions in promoting and preventing early marriage practices in the study area.

### **1.4.1. Data Sources**

The research employed different methods of data collection based on the situation. These include primary and secondary data collection methods. However the research relied on primary data sources. The main primary data collection methods were: key informant interviews, in-depth interviews (case studies and/or life stories), and focus group discussions through observation. The study participants were girls and women, grandparents, parents and daughters, council of elders

and knowledgeable individuals, different institutional heads and members in the PAs, health officers and *Woreda* officials. Thus, a total of 27 key informant interviews, 20 in-depth interviews and 10 focus group discussions were conducted (see Appendix 1, 2 & 3).

The researcher selected key informants for primary data collection based on the criteria outlined by Tremblayi (1989) in Marshall (1996). These were: (1) ***Role in community*** (their formal role which exposes them to the kind of information being sought by the researcher). (2) ***Knowledge*** (the absorbed and meaningful information of informants). (3) ***Willingness*** (good communication and cooperation). (4) ***Communicability*** (they should be able to communicate their knowledge in intelligible manner). (5) ***Impartiality*** (key informants should be objective and unbiased). Thus, the extent to which each of the criteria is met is likely to determine the usefulness of the information gained by the researcher (ibid).

Moreover, all the interviews and focus group discussions were carried out at homes, farming places, churches, school compounds and in different social gatherings. Interviews were an average 35 minutes (Minimum time was 20 minute and Maximum time 1 hr.). The Interviews were audio-taped and notes were attentively taken. Tape recording was possible to all interviews and focus group discussions. The recorder was set up prior to the interview and the tape recorder was visible to all the participants. Every question of the study has been accepted and well answered.

In short the primary data collection tools are expressed below:

### **A. Key informant Interviews**

Through this nondirective, unstructured, non-standardized and open-ended method the following participants were addressed: *Woreda* and PA officials, Health officers, different institutional leaders, council of elders and heads of female students' advisory committee and others (see Appendix 3). Accordingly, this method enabled the researcher to understand and examine their points of view. Moreover, through this method, the life histories and generational analysis of community members were gathered. In all instances, the researcher treated himself as a learner because he was convinced that they were the experts on the issue at hand.

Besides, since the issue was sensitive, the researcher gets much information about the hidden arrangement of early marriage through informal ethnographic interviews. Spradley (1980) makes a clear distinction between informal and formal ethnographic interviews. Accordingly, informal ethnographic interview occurs whenever an ethnographer asks someone a question during the course of participant observation. Whereas a formal ethnographic interview usually occurs at an appointed time and results from a specific request to hold the interview. As a result, this enabled the researcher to get the required information from a wide range of people.

## **B. Case Studies**

The case studies were done through in-depth interviewing. For qualitative research, interviewing is flexible and dynamic, and is therefore described as in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviewing is thus explained as repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and participants, directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005).

Early married girls and/or women were selected and their life stories were recorded and narrated to achieve the research objectives. Accordingly, a total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with early married female grandparents, parents and children. These interviews helped the researcher gain a crucial understanding of early married grandparents', parents' and children's experience and memories as a member of the community. In this regard, the selection of interviewees was based on the key informants' and community elders' direction. Consequently, each of the 20 girls and/or women in the study offered their oral history and life after the marriage, which are useful for the analysis and the selected cases were presented in each themes of the thesis (see Appendix 3). Thus, the study believed that, the stories of early married girls and/or women were part of the communal way of life, their history and voice is relevant as it tells their story as part of their society's way of life and social order.

The researcher also used specific probes under many themes that were: under life history he probed for turning points, anything lacking in life, any regrets, and how the life patterns connected to the historical and current marriage arrangement patterns. Accordingly, probing questions encouraged participants to reflect more deeply on the meaning of their responses.

Hence, their marriage life stories, which geared from in-depth interviews were tape recorded and narrated in each themes of the study.

### **C. Focus Group Discussions**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a type of group in-depth interview. It involves interaction among a small group of people with common identifiable characteristics, which respond to and build on what others in the group have said. Every participant is encouraged to express his or her views on each topic raised and also to respond to the views expressed by the other participants (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005).

Thus, the FGDs of the study embraced male and female household heads, early married girls, community elders and knowledgeable individuals. As a result, 10 FGD's were carried out (see Appendix 2). After each discussion, the researcher summarized the findings from the discussions. Tape recording was used as an instrument and at the same time the researcher conscientiously took notes. Each FGD was on a fixed homogenous number of 3 participants. The homogeneous FGD discussants were parents, early married girls, council of elders and knowledgeable individuals of the community.

The researcher used FGDs to capture the informants' attitudes, feelings, and beliefs as well as their experiences in the study area and their feedbacks to the research questions. Furthermore, to get all the participants during the FGD sessions, the researcher used social gatherings as a better situation to fix a time for a discussion. Though it took time to arrange the meeting, it helped the researcher to get relevant information, after an arrangement, within a short period of time. Each FGDs took a maximum of 90 minutes and a minimum of 50 minutes. The FGDs were held in 'natural' settings for community gatherings and generally took place outdoors in the shade of a tree, in a public space like in the PAs and school compounds.

### **D. Personal Observation**

In this study non-participant observations were held. Thus it was used as a noninteractive strategy for collecting ethnographic data which allowed the researcher to gather information with little or no exchange with the study participants. Thus role of the researcher here was observing and

attending events very carefully without taking part. Moreover, the researcher tried to attentively observe and participate in the daily life of the society. The researcher also believed that it helped to dig-out inaccessible or surreptitious issues of early marriage which could not be accessed through other methods. Ehigie & Ehigie (2005) further noted as observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study. The observational record is frequently referred to as *field notes*—detailed, nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed.

Pelto and Pelto (1978) in LeCompte and Goetz (1982) added that, as a category separate from participant observation, non-participant observation involves merely watching what is going on and recording events on the spot. As a completely distinct category, nonparticipant observation exists only where interaction is viewed from hidden cameras and recorders or through one-way mirrors. Whenever researchers are observing on the scene, they acquire some role and status. Thus, the ethnographic data collection time is based on the observational model of Spradley (1980). First, I made a general observation and then immersed my self into the community through time. Furthermore, Spradley (1980) disclosed that participant observation begins with wide descriptive observations, although these continue until the end of the fieldwork. The emphasis shifts from too focused observations to selective observation.

In addition, during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion times the researcher attentively observed the facial expressions, movements and feelings of the study participants.

## **1.5. Fieldwork Experience and Methods of Data Analysis**

### **1.5.1. Fieldwork Experience**

I conducted 8 weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in the two purposely selected peasant associations (PAs) of *Fogera Woreda*. The two PAs were Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael. The fieldwork was done from 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2010 to March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010. During this time, different activities have been conducted. These activities were carried out with smooth relationship with community members, because social relationships are seen as a basic instrument in anthropological research. According to Zaharlick (1992) an ethnographer collaborating with another person or persons,

variously called subjects, respondents, consultants, or informants, creates social relationships within which exchanges of information occur.

Consequently this study mainly relied on qualitative research methods to gather the relevant primary data through active observation. Furthermore, this particular observation enabled the researcher to dig out the day to day lives of the community members through “participation”. As Flick (2002) asserted, qualitative research methodology is developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena and it is designed to help the researchers to understand people and the socio-cultural context within which they live. It also allows the researchers to view events, actions, norms, values from the perspective of the people who are being studied.

Hence, I attempted to not totally influence and stick by etic perspective, rather I tried to know, learn and understand the community members from their point of view, because they are experts on their culture. In a plain language, understanding the reasons of the parents for their arrangement of early marriage in a hidden manner should take a priority and I went to the field with a free mind.

Accordingly, in the first week of the ethnographic fieldwork, I had to get the permission and good will of the *Woreda* administrative officer. After giving the supports letter from the Social Anthropology’s Department to the *Woreda* administrative office, the office wrote a letter to different institutions in the selected peasant associations. Then copies of the administrative endorsement were carried and shown to the institution heads in the PAs to get their authenticity in the research process.

At that time, I also made a key informant interviews with different officials and institution heads at the *Woreda* level. Basically, this interview and exposure with the issue enabled me to select the two PAs study areas from among the 28 PAs in the *Woreda*. Then I went to the selected PAs and made key informant interviews with health extension workers, PA leaders, school principals, gender activists, council of elders, knowledgeable individuals, religious fathers or leaders, CBO leaders and coordinators. Moreover, I contacted potential participants of the study, after my

engagement in the study community as one of their members, and then I introduced the objective of the study and explained what their involvement would entail. In doing so, my research assistant in the Kuahr Mikael and my family members in the Zeng Mikael PAs helped me a lot.

Hence the study focused on obtaining data from a couple of primary data sources which are key informants, case study informants (the early married girls) and focus group discussants. The key informants provided detailed and historical based information concerning issues of the changing and hidden aspects of early marriage arrangements. They also provide the changing feature of early marriage arrangements of the study area through time. In addition to that they were directing me towards the target case study early married girls. However, it has been a bit difficult to approach the case study girls in order to collect first hand information for they are too reluctant to be asked because their marriage is arranged in a disguised manner. They do not feel easy to tell the goings-on in their lives since they are well aware that their marriage is arranged “illegally”. However through different reasons I could able to approach early married girls and convinced them about the academic purpose of their contribution. Accordingly my blood relatives in Zeng Mikael PA helped me in the easy going of the research process. In Kuahr Mikael, on the other hand, I had to manipulate a way to find a host family by discussing issues with the PA officials. I have succeeded in finding a host family where I found moderators who assisted me in contacting several early married girls in the study area.

Accordingly during the second week of the fieldwork, I got myself more immersed in the lives of the community and was able to manage things alone. Fortunately, it was not difficult to immerse in the community because they treated everybody as their own member. Moreover, the Ethiopian epiphany celebration helped me to know community members and introduced myself easily. Accordingly, I was able to attend the day to day activities of the community members and participated in different local religious and social ceremonies, like, *Ṭəməqät*, *zäkər*, *täzkär*, *mahəbär*, *sənbäte*, *krəstənnä*, and so on.

After the second week, I got myself as being one of their members in many instances and I was fully confident to handle my research process alone. Thus, for the last six weeks of field stay the following activities have been conducted:

- ✓ I attended the day to day activity of the community members in the house, ploughing places, institutional sessions and meetings, religious and social gatherings and so on. I was also invited as one of their members in the coffee ceremony. Fortunately, this was the best place to hear and attend the social life easily. Moreover, coffee ceremony discussions served me as a mini mirror to know the community's life.
- ✓ I made key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and FGDs with selected key participants.
- ✓ I was able to witness the covert part of the society, and the hidden arrangement patterns of early marriage.

Through the process of data collection, all participants of the study were asked on their participation in the study. When the individuals agreed to participate, an appointment was scheduled to conduct an interview and focus group discussions. Moreover, the in-depth interviews of early married girls took place in a neutral situation chosen in order to care for them from detection in the study by others. Additionally, all the focus group discussions and interviews were conducted by the working language of the state, Amharic. The interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy of responses and then transcribed which took several days. The information audiotaped from early married girls was deleted after transcription.

With regards to primary data collection procedures, the focus group discussions were scheduled during the time of social gatherings, mainly after Sunday church ceremony. Interviews with key informants (Woreda and PA officials, Woreda and PA health institution heads, religious and CBO leaders, council of elders, student advisory committee heads, see also Appendix 2 & 3) were done at the individuals' homes, work places, in church, schools and on the farmland at times that were convenient for them. Most of the interviews were taped, with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed and translated. Field notes were also taken at each interview and focus group discussion. Some of the key informants trusted the researcher after a long time of interactions; though they asked him time and time again as "*lämängstt atnagärm aydäll?*" (we

hope you will never report to the Government). Thus, it was difficult to talk and use tape-recorder and photograph camera with such informants until the researcher was able to convince them about the study's academic purpose.

My actual encounter in the research sites favored me in terms of internalizing the core of my research objectives. I have had a real experience spending time with community members with a chance to observe their actual day to day activities that implicitly contributed to my understanding on the intrigues surrounding hidden early marriage arrangements in the study area. I have also had personal experience which helped me to analyze the collected data from a first hand point of view, from emic point of view, rather than merely depending on gathered facts and figures. As the community members conduct early marriage in a disguised manner, I have had a practical opportunity to observe and collect factual data related with the means by which parents organize early marriage for their daughters by disguising of it to concerned bodies. I have closely followed up how such early marriages were arranged in a hidden manner which is the core idea of this study.

In general, the admirable life of the community members and their wonderful hospitality made the data collection process smooth and fast. Moreover, there was no difficulty to introduce myself to them and knowing them too. Everybody was greeting me, *dähəna adärkä* (good morning), my *gash* their *dähəna arefädkä* (good afternoons) unbelievable during all times I meet them. With them, what matters most is being a human and ultimately nothing else and do not bother about other aspects and complications of life. It made me think like I found myself in a complete utopia.

### **Challenges in a Fieldwork**

Last, but not least, in my stay in the field, I encountered manageable difficulties like:

- ✓ The difficulty to get consent from my informants. Since early marriage was a sensitive and “illegal” issue most of the informants considered and treated me as a government official. So, it took time to convince them that I used the information only for academic purpose. Thus, in order to solve this problem, I was obliged to meet them frequently to familiarize myself with them.

- ✓ The difficulty of making focus group discussions with early married girls and the challenges of tape recording their voices. Since, their marriage took place secretly; they hesitate to form a group, which happened after a lot of attempts.
- ✓ Difficulty of taking photographs and recording wedding ceremonies. Since, the early marriage arrangement takes place under the umbrella of *zākār*, *tāzkār*, *mahābār*, *daggās* and so on, they would not want the secret to be known.
- ✓ Transport problem and lack of electricity.

### **1.5.2. Methods of Data Analysis**

In the course of the two months field stay to gather data for this study, I have divided the activities into daytime tasks and night tasks. During the daytime I would go around the villages to contact key informants as well as case study girls. I have also engaged in paying a visit to social gatherings such as coffee ceremonies which brings several potential informers on board. In most cases I would tape-record the facts I needed while observing necessary ethnographic details. At other times I would just pay attention to significant details and draw conclusions on how to approach the issues on the study instead of merely tape-recording the facts. During the night I have transcribed the data in to my special research note book in order to fit it to the study. This task appeared a bit tough since there was no electricity in both research sites. Consequently I had to use the local lantern to keep my work going for sometime through the night

The validity and trustworthiness of this study were addressed through prolonged interview engagement and participant observation during the fieldwork. I further invited my informants to clarify parts of their own narratives after transcription. Triangulation of various primary data sources was made based on the audiotaped data, field notes, and transcripts. Finally, both primary and secondary sources were organized and analyzed thematically through triangulation of data gathered through various sources.

### **1.5.3. Ethical Considerations**

Each participants of the study were pre-informed, before every interview and discussions about the information the researcher obtained from them will be used only for research purposes and it will be kept confidential. Since the issues as well as the objectives of the study are sensitive, most

of the actual names of the research participants have been changed for the very fact of skipping the informants' from detection. As a result **pseudonyms** are used to distinguish their identity.

## **1.6. Study Area and Research Site Selection**

Though the study was limited in coverage and duration it was conducted in Fogera *Woreda* peasant associations of Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael. The study PAs was purposely selected by the researcher to represent a brief and detailed contrasting situation with respect to the study objectives. Kuahr Mikael represents those areas that share border with Dera *Woreda* and it is also among the well known PAs of the *Woreda* in rice production and irrigation. On the other hand, Zeng Mikael represents the lowland area of the *Woreda* and the bordering PAs of Farta *Woreda* (see Appendix 4). In the later PA, the major production is *teff* and the farmers' production process is based on rainy season. And hence, in the former study area a better income households and busy farmers were found than the latter one.

Moreover, the distance of the selected PAs to the town of Woreta, the centre of Fogera *Woreda* (Zeng Mikael (34KM) is very remote where as Kuahr Mikael (7KM) is nearby to the town); and the availability of different institutions like primary and second cycle schools, police stations and the like were taken into considerations.

Thus, the study PAs were purposely selected to represent contrasting situations with respect to the hidden and changing arrangement patterns of early marriage in Fogera *Woreda*. However, the study never tried to generalize on the marriage arrangement patterns of the *Woreda*; rather it gives a simple insight about the two research sites.

On the other hand, the major reasons for the selection of this study area were:

- ✓ the continuity of the early marriage practice in hidden manners;
- ✓ the familiarity and know how of the researcher in the hidden features of early marriage arrangement practices in the community. The research sites were nearby to the researchers birth place; and
- ✓ The lack of empirical and anthropological researches in the area.

Therefore, by taking the aforementioned and other motives, into consideration, the researcher was eager to uphold this anthropological study on early marriage in the area for the first time.

### **1.7. Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The data for this study were gathered from Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs in Fogera *Woreda*. The study gathered data through the ethnographic data collection methods over two months in the study area. Moreover based on the objectives of the study the vital and huge focus was taken from early married girls/women as well as a researcher deliberately live his informants to tell and speak on their feelings, attitudes, thoughts and emotions on the research objectives.

There were several basic limitations which were the study suffered and that should be taken into consideration while considering the results. These were:

- ✓ The difficulty and absence of anthropological researches done previously that could have served as a reference material to the title of the study in general and the research sites in particular. Only two anthropological researches were available, which both of them also done in Gojjam of Ethiopia. The rest secondary data results were reports, national surveys and general views of governmental organizations. However this is an indication that more research is needed in the study area.
- ✓ Time and money constraints have also been crippling limitations that confined this research to two PAs. Hence it is very difficult to say anything about the Fogera *Woreda* by taking only the two PAs from 28 PAs. Moreover, due to time constraint, it should be noted that all the interviews and observation of the researcher does not cover the whole complexity of the changing and hidden aspects of early marriage arrangements in the study area.
- ✓ The hidden natures of early marriage arrangements made it very difficult to the researcher to access and obtain all relevant information.
- ✓ The researcher also argued that all the plenty and rich data could not be fully translated into English as all the ethnographic data were gathered in Amharic.

## **1.8. Significance of the Study**

The study is believed to have the following significances:

- ✓ It provides a better insight and new exploration about the changing and hidden arrangement pattern of early marriage.
- ✓ It contributes an academic understanding of community members on the practice of early marriage in a hidden manner.
- ✓ It may also serve as a benching stone in the changing and hidden arranging pattern of early marriage to further studies.
- ✓ It also aims to federal government institutions and other organizations have used the results of ethnographic studies to improve agency programs, policies and procedures.
- ✓ It is also believed that this study not only provides examples of how the federal and regional governments uses ethnography but also suggests some means of expanding and improving its use of ethnography and the results of it. I hope that it will provide a resource to agencies that face site specific or broader issues involving community members important to program success.

# CHAPTER TWO

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1. Definition of Terms Used in the Study

#### 2.1.1. Marriage

The problem of satisfactory definition of marriage has vexed anthropologists for decades and has been raised, but not solved, several times in recent years (Bohannan & Middleton, 1968; Holy, 1996).

The notes and queries (1951) in Bohannan & Middleton (1968:49) define marriage as “a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offsprings of both parents”. Serious objection has been raised by Riviere (1971) in Holy (1996), as if the function of marriage is the legitimation of children, the legitimacy of children clearly depends on marriage. Leach (1982) in (Holy, 1996) further argued that legitimacy is a social concept which is not tied with the issue of who is the biological parent of the child. Thus, marriage serves to ‘enforce exclusively’, to ensure commitment of resources and to provide a context for the bearing and raising of children (Dominican, 1995; Leach, 1982, cited in Holy, 1996).

“Marriage” is seen as a rite that is pre-eminent in the life-cycle of all individuals surpassed only by birth and death (Sweetman 2003). It is also the emotional and legal commitment of two people to share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks and economic resources (Olson & DeFrain, 2000; Barnard & Spencer, 2002). Moreover, marriage, birth, death and initiation of puberty, are rearrangements of structure that constantly recurring in any society and moments of the continuing social process regulated by custom (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1970).

### **2.1.2. Child**

Article 1 of the CRC (1989) defines a “child” as ‘every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’. Furthermore, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, defined “child” in Article 2 as ‘every human being below the age of 18 years’.

### **2.1.3. Childhood-Girlhood**

Studies of children have been central to the development of social sciences (Barnard & Spencer, 2002:92). Margaret Mead was one of the first anthropologists to realize that “childhood is culturally variable and that an understanding of how exactly a child becomes an adult is important for anthropology as a comparative study of human possibilities” (ibid).

Age may not be the sufficient base of childhood, because there are certain rites, other than the biological maturity of a child, which needs a fulfillment (Tirusew, et.al. 1997: 6 cited in Guday, 2005:51). Thus, the “concept of childhood must always be related to a particular social framework” (Rodgers & Standing, 1981 and Tirusew, et.al. 1997: 6 cited in Guday, 2005:51). The Ethiopian Civil Code (1960) is, therefore, defined child as “a minor age of sex who has not attained the full age of 18 years”. Thus, for the purpose of this study, like Guday (2005:51ff) the notions of “child-hood, girl-hood and girl-child” refer those girls below the age of 18.

### **2.1.4. Early Marriage**

Definitions of “early marriage” are about as numerous as the individual researchers who have been concerned with the problem (Bartz & Nye, 1970). Thus, it is difficult to define “early marriage” without any societal based description. Accordingly, Bartz & Nye (1970) defined “early marriage” as “one in which the bride is 18 years of age or under and the groom is 20 years of age or under”. And hence, they give a brief explanation on their definition of early marriage in general and age variation of boys and girls in particular. Therefore, they claimed that “since boys mature physically, emotionally, and socially about two years later than girls, the ‘18 years and under’ criterion is not equally appropriate for boys. Usually, legal definitions differentiate the minimum ages at which boys and girls may marry at two years younger for girls”. Furthermore,

the study of FMRWG (2003) cited in Guday (2005) asserted that the notion of man as a household head means that he is often financially better off and older than the brides.

Though early marriage is an issue of concern for both girls and boys, the major concern is held on girls. The reason behind this argument is that the phenomenon is not as widespread among boys, and because many of the consequences, such as the physical dangers associated with early childbirth, or status and power in the household, are specific to girls (Sweetman, 2003:10). Moreover, “in the traditional setting of Ethiopia, the social conception of ‘a girl is no longer a child’ (Guday, 2005:54) and ‘a girl does not belong to a land but has got feet’ has had a significant impact for the occurrence of early marriage.

Thus, early marriage “will be used to refer to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before the age of 18” (UNICEF, Apr. 2005). Other terms applied to child marriage include “early marriage” and “child brides” (Nour, 2006). Though, child marriage, early marriage and child brides are seen as interchangeable and are similar, this study used early marriage to explain the changing and hidden arrangement of children’s marriage in the study community. This research uses the term early marriage instead of child marriage just like most of other researches in the field. It is argued by this study also that early life to marriage and the concept of childhood appear to be slightly different from the emic point of view. Especially the community member in the study area gives a different interpretation to the term ‘child’ which does not go with the concept of early marriage in general. Another fact is that the term early marriage at least understood by community members “equally” with the etic point of view than the concept of child.

Consequently the revised family law (2000) of Ethiopia set the minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls at 18 years. It assured, in Article 7.1., as “neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage”. Moreover Zikre Hig of ANRS (2001), in Article 34.2, revealed that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”.

## 2.2. Forms of Marriage

According to Hoben (1963, cited in Alemante, 2004:21), there are three types of monogamous marriage arrangements in the Amhara Region: *balakkul*, *qurban* and *demewez*. Accordingly, *balakkul* refers to the equal rights of the spouses during their marriage contract. The *qurban* is a religious marriage which is held in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. *Demewez* refers to a marriage arrangement based on a payment of money contract. Alternatively, Pankhrust (1992) in Alemante (2004) also listed six types of marriage arrangement patterns: *serg* (ceremonial marriage); *qurban* marriage (religious marriage); *semanya* (civil marriage); *kotassir* (marriage proceeded by provision of labor); *demewez* (paid labor marriage); and *telefa* (marriage by abduction).

Guday (2005:91) classified marriage types into two: primary and secondary forms of marriage. According to her, church sanctioned marriage (*yäqurban gabaêêa*) and non-church sanctioned marriage (*yälməd (bahəlawi) gabaêêa*) were grouped in the former category. Whereas, *kənədəš bəkənde gabêêa* (a formal type of marriage without parental endowment such as cattle and other property) and *yäcən gərəd gabêêa* (a non-formal type of marriage with a servant and wife at the same time, which is based on the monthly or annual payment) were grouped into the latter category.

On the other hand different studies (Tilahun, 2005:5; SCD, MOE & WAO, 2008:19) classified early marriage arrangement procedures in Ethiopia into the following four types:

1. **Promissory marriage**, one that takes place even before the birth of the child.
2. **Child marriage**, under 10 years of age in which the girl is introduced to wifhood under the guidance of parent-in-laws until she reaches puberty.
3. **Early adolescent marriage**, one concluded when the girl is between the ages of 10 to 14. At this instance the girl may stay with her parents' home and periodically visit her parent-in-laws.
4. **Late adolescent marriage**, i.e., between the ages of 15 to 18.

In addition, Haile Gabriel (1994) and UN ECA (1999) in Guday (2005:45) added two marriage types. These were **adult marriage** (which takes place between the ages of 16 and 20) and **old age marriage** (which takes above the age of 20). Tilahun (2005) noted that the first three types of

marriage arrangements are practiced in the northern and central parts of Ethiopia. Also in the society marriage at seven or eight is not uncommon (UNICEF, 2001).

Early marriages in northern Ethiopia are parent-centered arrangements between two families of different lineages, and are both traditional and widely prevalent. Thus, it may be contracted between families as a verbal agreement from before or any time after the two children's birth (Haile Gabriel, 1994).

### **2.3. Early Marriage Arrangement Patterns**

#### **2.3.1. Forced Marriage and Arranged Early Marriage**

In both instances, the child groom or bride has not legal instance to give any consent. Furthermore, Sweetman (2003:10) argued that “early marriages, even when they occur with the seeming consent of the child, violate the basic rights of the child, and since by legal definition a child cannot give consent”. However, the young are allowed no liberty of choice and everything is determined for them by their elders (Peil & Oyeneye, 1998; DelCampo & DelCampo, 1999; Olson & DeFrain, 2000). In arranged marriages, the initiative is taken by the parents of the couples, but consent is required from both partners (UNICEF, 2001). On the other side, during forced marriage, the pressure from parents is very high and the younger the bride or the groom the less chance there to exercise this right (UNICEF, 2001; Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003).

In early arranged marriage, considerations of lineage and family status are generally more important than love or affection. Accordingly, it serves to extend existing family units than to create a new one and reinforces ties with other families in the community, by strengthening the order and organization of the community (Olson & DeFrain, 2000).

Thus, when parents arrange marriages for their children, the two young spouses often do not even know each other until the marriage has been arranged (Kammeyer, 1987; UNICEF, 2001). The basis for choosing a potential marriage mate will include economic considerations, the social status or prestige of the families, and often the potential for political alliances and family ties (Kammeyer, 1987; Guday, 2005). Love between the prospective marriage partners is not expected before marriage and often is of small consequence after marriage (Kammeyer, 1987).

Moreover, any marriage, in Africa, is a matter of interest not only to the parents of both parties but to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each marrying spouses (Mair, 1969; Astone, N. et.al., 1999).

In regards, most customary marriages among the rural parts of Ethiopia are arranged marriages, “without the free consent of the would-be spouses, mostly without the consent of the would-be young brides” (Guday, 2005). In addition, early-childhood marriage, as early as 80 days of birth, is most common for girls (ibid).

## **2.4. The Magnitude and Prevalence of Early Marriage**

### **2.4.1. Early Marriage in the World**

Nour (2006) reported the magnitude of early marriage worldwide as in 2002, nearly 52 million girls before they attained the age of 18 years were married. Accordingly 25,000 girls were married each day; an estimated 100 million will be married by 2012. Moreover, one in seven girls in the developing world marries before they aged 15 (Population Council 2006 cited in Jain & Kurz, 2007).

Early marriage is more prevalent in developing countries and in particular in poorer communities, of those who live on less than a dollar a day. Current estimates show that about 82 million girls in developing countries (excluding China) who are presently aged between 10 and 17 will be married before they reach the age of 18, while 163 million of the 331 million girls who are presently aged between 10 and 19 will be married before they are 20 (Bruce 2002, cited in Sweetman 2003; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003).

The following case is a major indicator of the extent in which early marriage exists in the “third world” countries. As a result, an early married girl became the great grandmother before she is 40, at the age of 38:

*Bano was married at the age of 10 and had her first child when she was 11. Her daughter was 12 when she married and 13 when she had her own child, making Bano a grand-mother at 24. Bano's granddaughter also married at puberty and gave birth when she was 14, thus Bano become a great-grandmother at 38 (adapted from Amrit Dhilln, The Times, 28 August 2002, in Sweetman 2003; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003).*

In general, early marriage is highly prevalent in a traditional social fabric that is characterized, among others, by the extended family structure, communal households, the authority of the paterfamilias, choice of mates by elders and the household role and identity of women (Tilahun, 2005).

#### **2.4.2. Early Marriage in Ethiopia**

Although Ethiopia has a Constitution which bans both early and forced marriages, these still occur in some rural contexts (Sweetman 2003: 47). The issue is also elaborated in Phillips & Morris (1971) that African girls were married at any age at which they would in any case and/situation. The vast majority of marriages in Ethiopia arranged and were not consented to by the bride, it is estimated that 94 percent of the marriages were arranged by parents (Erulkar et.al. 2007).

Likewise, early marriage is seen as a way to improve the economic status of the family, to strengthen ties between families, to ensure that girls are virgins when they marry, to avoid the possibility of a girl reaching an age where she is no longer desirable as a wife “*Qoma Qerech*” (Alemante, 2004; Guday, 2005; EWLA, 2005; Pathfinder 2006) or “*Haafuu*” (Amsalu, 2007) and to protect their daughters from abduction (EWLA, 2005). Similarly, the mostly cited reasons of early marriage are poverty and parents’ desire to protect the girl. Accordingly “researchers found that early marriage is related to underdevelopment, poverty and the low status of women” (SCD, MoE & MoWA, 2008:20). Different studies reported that early marriage has different consequences on the wellbeing of girls and women, such as sexual and reproductive health (Alemante 2004), education (Guday 2005), autonomy and decision-making, gender-based violence, sexual transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Moreover, early marriage of girls is also linked to other rights, such as the right to express views freely, the right to protection from all forms of abuse, and the right to be protected from “harmful traditional practices” (UNICEF, Apr.2005).

The global DHS Survey (2006) indicates that Ethiopia ranked among the leaders, 12<sup>th</sup>, among the 20 top lists, in the number of girls married before the age of 18 (Jain & Kurz, 2007). Moreover, another DHS data (2006) conducted in sub-Saharan Africa ranked Ethiopia as the fourth leading

nation on the arrangement of early marriage of the area (ACPF, 2006). Thus, nearly 27 percent of rural women in Tigray and 48 percent in Amhara were married before the age of 15 (Gage, 2009). This contrasts with 13 percent in Oromia and 7 percent in SNNPR. On the other end, urban marriages before 15 years are fewer (19 percent in Tigray, 28 percent in Amhara, 10 percent in Oromia, and 14 percent in SNNPR). Furthermore, a high percentage of women are married between 15 and 17 in all regions, but in Oromia and SNNPR, 40 percent or more marry after the age of 18 (Birhan RDC, 2005). The national rate for early marriage stands at 54% (EWLA, 2005; FDRE, 2006). Moreover, 48 percent of child marriage occurs in the northern regions of the country, with the respective high prevalence in Amhara (90 percent), Tigray (82 percent), Afar (77 percent) and Benishangul-Gumuz (75 percent) (Jain & Kurz, 2007).

The report of Advocates for Youth uses early marriage and child marriage interchangeably and affirms the situation in Ethiopia as, child marriage often marks an abrupt transition into sexual relations with a husband who is considerably older than the girl being married. At the national level, 62 percent of Ethiopian women aged 20-49 get married before the age of 18 and some girls marry as early as age seven (Mimi, 2008). Yet, in many instances, a husband and wife may grow up by playing together in the house of the husband's parents. Thus, the mother-in-law protects the girl from any advances by her son (UNICEF, 2001).

In the previous family law (Civil Code of Ethiopia, 1960) that was applicable throughout the country, there was a different minimum age for marriage regarding boys and girls (Guday, 2005:31; FMLSA, 2005). For girls, it was 15 and for boys it was 18. In addition to this, there was a provision in the law allowing the Emperor or a person appointed by him to grant age dispensation up to 2 years. However, currently, in the regions where the new family law (FDRE, 2000) is governing, the minimum age of marriage for girls is now raised to 18. For boys, all except one region (Tigray) has the same minimum age as that of girls. In one region in the country, that is Tigray, the minimum age for boys is 22 years. All the laws mandate the Ministry of Justice (Justice Bureau of the Regions) to grant age dispensation of a maximum of 2 years. The legal age of marriage applies to all forms of marriage: civil, customary and religious. When we look at the penal law (the 1957 penal code) contains provisions that have limited application to early marriage, whereas the revised family law (2000) has incorporated a more direct article,

which states that “the conclusion, solemnization, witnessing or approving of a marriage that does not fulfill the conditions laid down by the family law is criminally punishable with a maximum sentence of 3 years in intentional cases”. As indicated above, one of such conditions is age (FMLSA 2005).

### **2.4.3. Early Marriage in Amhara National Regional State (ANRS)**

In the region of Amhara, early marriage is deeply-rooted and commonly practiced (Pathfinder 2006, 2009; Erulkar, et.al. 2004; Alemante 2004; Guday 2005; SCD, MOE & WAO, 2008). The studies also revealed that, in the aforementioned region, early marriage led the girls and women to Fistula. Worst of all, lack of transportation, information and finance has had their own impact on losing girls and women life. Furthermore, the highest prevalence of early marriage in Amhara region holds a lions share in the fistula victims of girls and women in the country.

The Amhara Region has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. According to the 2000 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 31 percent of women aged 15-49 years were married before the age of 15 (Central Statistical Authority (CSA) and ORC Macro, 2001, cited in Gage, 2009) and more than half of young marriages were arranged with a man who was at least 10 years older than the girl (Pathfinder International, 2006, cited in Gage, 2009).

Girls are mostly married early, because large families are viewed as indicators of prestige and individual wealth (Pathfinder, Feb.2006). Thus, early childbearing is common and the median age of marriage in the region is as low as 15.2 years which is less than the country’s median age of marriage, 16.1 years (Pathfinder, 2006; UNFPA 2008). More specifically, in the area of Gojjam, “88% of girls were married before the age of 15, and, 37% before they were 10” (SCD, MOE & MWA, 2008:20) and “marriage may be imposed from birth, with the girl sent to her future husband’s home at around the age of seven to begin her integration in to her marriage family” (UNICEF, 2001).

Furthermore, based on her intensive and in-depth ethnographic data, Guday (2005:124) classified early marriage arrangements in the Gojjam of Amhara into four types as:

- ✓ *Yäqal kidan gabêca* (promissory marriage, betrothal before birth).

- ✓ *Yanqäläbba gabêêa* (marriage of a female child who is still on the back of her mother and fed her mother's breast, or marriage of a girl-child between the ages of five and nine).
- ✓ *Yämadäggo gabêêa* (marriage of a girl-child between the ages of five and nine); and
- ✓ *Yäläğännät gabêêa* (marriage between female and male children, females between the ages of 10 and 14, and males between the ages of 15 and 17).

However, sexual intercourse between the young married girl (below the age of nine) and her husband is formally forbidden. Helen Pankhrust (1992), cited by Guday (2005) from EWLA et.al. 2002, gave three major reasons for it: (1) A high social and cultural value attached to virginity; (2) The need for creating a bond between families rather than a personal arrangement by bride and groom; and (3) A growing trend towards a reduction of ritual and expenditure for all marriages, combined with a shift toward informality.

## 2.5. Reasons for Early Marriage

The major reasons for early marriage are the direct results and interrelated outcomes of the demand and supply sides. As a result, Sweetman (2003) argued that the arrangement of early marriage is held between the mutual consensus of demand and supply sides. Here, the argument urges to indicate the 'supply side' as the households marry their daughters at a young age and the 'demand side for men and or the households who prefer young brides. This line of reasoning further elaborates that "the demand for young brides in and of itself will not generate significant numbers of early marriages, unless there is a supply of young brides available. Similarly, even if all parents wanted to marry their daughters young, if there were no demand for young brides, no early marriage would occur". Thus, the old dictum affirmed the issue as 'demand begets supply' and 'supply begets demand'. Moreover, men and their families may also view younger brides as more desirable because they are more easily controlled, and less assertive, because of their lack of physical, mental and emotional maturity. In addition, young brides are viewed as more 'trainable' (Sweetman 2003: 19).

Consequently, grinding poverty, dowry pressures, parental concerns about premarital sex and pregnancy, the low social status of women, lack of education and other economic or cultural reasons contribute to the practice of early marriage, whereas early marriage, in turn, reinforces

these conditions (Cohen, 2004; Haberland et.al. 2005). On the other hand, Alemante (2004) classified the major reasons of early marriage as political, economic and socio-cultural themes. He further considered them as ‘silent reasons of early marriage’. Similarly, Guday (2005) acknowledged economic motives and life insecurities, socio-cultural justifications, gender ideologies and lack of awareness about legal issues as the major reasons of early marriage. Additionally, Amsalu (2007:32) on his research finding revealed the major reasons as “economic motives derived from parents and close relatives, societal influences and cultural impacts”.

Haile Gabriel (1994) also summarized the major reasons behind the sustainability and maintenance of early marriage as a still stand practice as follow:

*The major factors that still sustain early marriage are the urgency to utilize the immediate capacity of parents to establish a family for their children; ‘the marriage rush’ is partly to enlarge kinship relations for protection and economic security. Another reason, of course, is the urge to conform to the internalized norms of age-old compelling tradition and the patriarchal subordination of women that places high value for virginity.*

In general, economical, socio-cultural, political reasons and the rate of urbanization were cited as the major reasons for early marriage. These factors are briefly explained below.

### **2.5.1. Economic Reasons**

Early marriage is most common in the world’s poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households within those countries. It is closely linked with poverty and low levels of economic development. In families with limited resources, child marriage is often seen as a way to provide for their daughter’s future. But girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor (ICRW, 2006). Furthermore, Sweetman (2003) asserted that there is a direct relation between arranged marriages and poverty. Thus, families in poverty will continue to resort to early marriage as a part of household livelihood strategies. Moreover, early marriage perpetuates the “feminization of poverty” and its resulting impact on their children (UNICEF, 2001) and had an intergenerational impact (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003).

Consequently, early marriage for girls is viewed as a means of economic survival, i.e., if a girl is married early, the family has one mouth less to feed, and the hope is that the girl herself will be

better off. In other words, parents may feel that marrying a daughter at a young age can help them economically (Heinonen, 2002, cited in Guday, 2005:24). Thus, parents view daughters as an economic burden that can be eased by marrying them off (Cohen, 2004; UNICEF, Apr. 2005; Tilahun, 2005; ACPF, 2006). As a result, this reduces the economic burden on the family in caring for the girl; and also increases family assets (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). Likewise, economic hardship is encouraging a rise in early marriage, even among some population groups that do not normally practice it (UNICEF, Apr. 2005).

Therefore, the parents' economic motive of early marriage arrangement is the eagerness of them to benefit from the social capital. Moreover, Astone, et.al. (1999) defined "social capital" as the resources that emerge from one's social ties. Thus, the economic status of parents is a major indication of whether their daughters will be married early or not (ICRW, 2007).

### **2.5.2. Socio-Cultural Reasons**

The socio-cultural justifications of parents for early marriage summarized by FMRWG (2000) and Heinonen (2002) in Guday (2005) as: fear of being dishonored as a result of delaying marriage and/or loss of virginity, to prevent abduction, to secure a proper marriage for daughters, and to forge links between families. More specifically, traditional justifications for early marriage may include: (1) Respect for traditions that dictate that girls should marry early; (2) The honoring of pledges to a family or benefactor; (3) The strengthening of community ties; and (4) Girls given as a substitute to the husband of a deceased sister. Moreover great shame is brought onto parents whose daughter never marries; she is their failure (UNICEF, Apr. 2005; Pathfinder, 2006, 2008).

### **2.5.3. Political Reasons**

Early marriage was employed as the tool to ascend the hierarchies' of community members in the upper classes of the society (Alemante, 2004). Accordingly, marriage arrangement pattern in Amhara society was a major means of making political alliance and integration between either the rural families or contending parties. Such type of marriage arrangement is commonly considered as a "political marriage" (Pankhrust, 1990; Yashi, 1995; Fisher, 1975; Lavine, 1965; Aleme, 1984, cited in Alemante 2004:25ff). Merid (1985) and Markakis (1975) in Alemante (2004:26) further asserted that early marriage was extensively used to stabilize political power

among the upper classes. It is, therefore, primarily designed to hold on political power and to channel available resources into the dominant groups of the society.

#### **2.5.4. Rate of Urbanization**

Different studies (e.g. Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003; Guday, 2005; Jain & Kurz, 2007) affirmed the relation between rural and urban residence with age at marriage, thus early marriage is more prevalent in rural areas than the urban ones. Accordingly, the study of Westoff (2003) in Jain & Kurz (2007) indicates that living in rural areas increases the likelihood of marrying early. Thus, girls in rural residences are more likely to marry 1.5 years younger than girls in urban areas. More over, Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi (2003) asserted that low urbanization rate has had its own impact on early marriage. Hence “the higher the level of urbanization, the less likely it is that women marry before they reach 20 years”. In view of that, early marriage is most common in the Amhara Region where the rate of urbanization is less than 9% (ANRSWAO, 2003, cited in Guday, 2005).

#### **2.6. Legal Frameworks and Early Marriage**

Most countries have declared 18 year as the minimum legal age of marriage, but parental consent and custom often ride roughshod over these laws. The current Ethiopian government has ratified different treaties and agreements with the international arena to protect the rights of women and children. The 1995 Constitution of FDRE is an exemplary which asserted the actual practice of international agreements and given unlimited rights both for women (Article 35) and children (Article 36) in different articles. Accordingly the constitution on Article 35 sub-article 4 elaborated that “the state shall enforce the right of women to eliminate the influences of harmful customs. Laws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited”. On the other hand Article 36 ensures about the rights of children and admitted in sub article 2 as “in all actions concerning children undertaken by public and private welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the primary consideration shall be the best interests of the child”.

Prior to the coming into force of the Revised Family Code, in 2000, the marriageable age for boys and girls was 18 and 15 respectively (EWLA, 2005). However, the family code (2000) on

Article 7 legislates that “neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage”. Moreover, the code elaborates the condition on Article 31 as “marriage concluded by a man or a woman under the age of eighteen years shall be dissolved on the application of any interested person or the public prosecutor” and, Article 6 states that “a valid marriage shall take place only when the spouses have given their free and full consent”.

*Zikre Hig* of the council of the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS, 2001) has different Articles on the rights of women and children in relation to marriage arrangements of the region: Article 16, 34, 35, are the major ones, which state the issue at hand as follows:

*Article 16. About the right to the security of the person states that “everyone has the right to protection against bodily harm”; Article 34.2 also states “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties”; Article 35. 4, on the other hand, affirmed that “the state shall enforce the rights which the woman have to extricate themselves from the influences of harmful customs, laws, customs and practices that are meant to oppress or cause physical or mental harm to women are prohibited.”*

Furthermore, Ethiopia ratified the UNCRC in 1991. Since then, the government has carried out numerous activities geared towards ensuring the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of children. The Convention was domesticated through a national legislation (Proclamation No 10/1992) and then translated into 11 nationality languages for dissemination. Further, other conventions such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ratification proclamation No283/ 2002) and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999) were ratified by the government. The Children Affairs Department within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is the leading organ to coordinate and spearhead the translation of the international commitment into concrete actions and results (FMLSA 2005). However Children Affairs Department is, now, under the Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs.

In addition, the state legal law (amended (2004) penal law, 1957) claimed that sexual intercourse with a girl of 13-18 years by a person of the opposite sex will be punishable with a maximum rigorous sentence of 15 years regardless of the girl’s consent for the act 629(1). The punishment will be aggravated to 20 years in the cases where the victim is the pupil, apprentice or servant of

the offender, or is in any other way directly dependent upon or subordinate to the offender (FMLSA 2005).

Thus, early marriage, marriages below 18 years of age, is a concern as it violates girls' rights, truncate their childhood, and frequently deny them a say in the choice of their partner and the timing of marriage. And hence, it circumscribes several rights of girl children outlined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including the right not to be separated from their parents against their will (Article 9), the right to freedom of expression (including seeking and receiving information and ideas (Article 13), the right to education (Articles 28 and 29), the right to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities (Article 31) and the right to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34).

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHRs) states that 'Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses and that men and women of full age... are entitled to equal rights as to marriage...'. Accordingly, whether it happens to a girl or a boy, early marriage is a violation of human rights (UNICEF, 2001).

Likewise, the United Nations (1962) Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration and an associated recommendation calls on member states to establish a minimum age of marriage of no less than 15 years. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also suggest a minimum age for marriage of 18 years, consistent with the definition of childhood articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). Accordingly, Article 16 of the CEDAW requires states to ensure that men and women have the same rights to enter in to marriage and to freely choose a spouse, and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent. On the same token, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in Article 21.2 states that "child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory".

In line with the above issue, the Federal Government of Ethiopia has signed and ratified regional and international instruments that promote and protect the rights of women and children. As a result CEDAW (1979) was ratified in September 1981 and periodical reports have been submitted on its implementation. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) was ratified in December 2002 and the National Action Plan for Children has been prepared for its implementation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) was ratified in September 1990 and the Ministry of Women's Affairs is given the responsibility of overseeing its effective implementation (FDRE, 2006; Gage, 2009).

Despite the above mentioned various resolutions, corresponding national laws, and the efforts of various national and international organizations, many young women (and to a lesser extent, men) in the developing world are still subject to early marriage (Sweetman 2003: 9; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Tilahun, 2005; Nour, 2006; Amsalu, 2007). Thus, the family issues are beyond the state's control (Surtees, 2000, in Sweetman, 2003), the use of law as a means of regulating early marriage is not sufficient enough (UNICEF, 2001).

Comprehensively, most of the research findings and academic works in early marriage intrigue the hidden arrangement of early marriage in the country in general and in the study area in particular. Thus, they either overlooked or did not given enough attention to the changing and dynamic aspects of early marriages. This study, therefore, particularly focuses on the changing and dynamic features of early marriage arrangement, which was not addressed by the previous studies. Hence, this study labors over filling the gap in the reviewed studies.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA AND THE PEOPLE

### 3.1. Study Area Description

The Amhara Region is one of the larger states of Ethiopia and is located in the Northern, North Eastern and Central parts of the country. It is the second largest state in the country, following Oromia region, and covers an area of 170,752km<sup>2</sup>, which is about 11 percent of Ethiopia's total area (Berhanu & Fayera, 2005; ANRS, 2010). The region is divided into eleven administrative zones, 106 rural and nine urban *woredas* and 2,927 rural *Kebeles*. Bahir Dar is the region's capital. Amhara region is divided into three major agricultural climatic zones: highland (*däga*) (above 2,300 meters), mid-highland, (*wäyina däga*) (1,500 to 2,300 meters) and lowland (*qolla*) (below 1,500 meters) accounting for 20%, 44% and 28% of the land area, respectively. This varied ecology is also a source of diversified agriculture in the region. A large part of the population is living in highland areas with steep slope topography (ibid. see also Appendix 4).

Fogera *Woreda*, the study area, is found in South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara Region (see Appendix 4). The *Woreda* is one of the eight *woredas* bordering Lake Tana and has estimated water bodies of 23,354 ha. It is classified as one of the surplus productizing *Woredas* in the region and endowed with stunning diverse natural resource, with the capacity to grow various annual and perennial crops. The altitude ranges from 1774 to 2410 masl. The mean annual rainfall is 1216.3mm and ranges from 1103 to 1336mm. The *Woreda* is mainly dominated by one long rainy season (ILRI & MoA, 2005; FWARDO, 2010). Fogera is bordered on the south by Dera, on the West by Lake Tana, on the North by the Ribb River which separates the place from Kemkem, and on the East by Farta. Rivers in Fogera include the Gumara and the Rib, both of which drain into Lake Tana. Rice, *Teff*, Corn, Sorghum, Cotton and Sesame are important cash crops (IPMS 2004, cited in Gordon, et.al. 2007; CSA, 2008; FWAO, 2010; FWARDO, 2010).

### 3.2. Eco-System

According to the Fogera Woreda Agricultural and Rural Development Office report (FWARDO, 2010), the *Woreda* is regarded as the mid-highland (*Woynadega*) and while a slight variation found in the PAs, including the research sites (Kuahr Mikael found in mid-highland, (*Woynadega*) while Zeng Mikael is under lowland (*Qolla*) PA.

*Belg and Meher* are two harvesting seasons, with short and long rainy periods, respectively. As a result, farmers depend on *Meher* season rain for crop production (ILRI & MoA, 2005). According to the FWARDO (2010), the dominant soil type in the Fogera plains is black clay soil (ferric vertisols), while the med and high altitude areas are orthic Luvisols.

### 3.3. Infrastructure

Away from the main-road, there is no access of electricity and virtually no telephone network although mobile phones work in some areas. The roads are difficult to access and many areas can only be reached on-foot or by horse or mules. Some Peasant Associations have diesel-powered mills uses by power generators.

The accessibility of infrastructure in general and road in particular is very poor mainly in Zeng Mikael PA. At this juncture, the stated area situation led the researcher to argue on the explanation of Bevan (1997) that Ethiopia's road transport system can not support an efficient and market-based production and distribution system. Its road density is one of the lowest in Africa and nearly 75% of farms are more than half a day's walk from all-weather roads. Accordingly, it takes 2 hours for community members of Zeng Mikael (students, marketers and miller user farmers) to reach the nearby small town Aember. On the other hand, lake transport is also very slow and uncertain; transfer from Fogera *Woreda* to Bahir Dar could take 5 hours, not including the time needed to walk to the lake shore (Gordon, et.al. 2007).

Animal dung, wood and crop residues are used as major source of energy in the area.

### 3.4. Resource Basis

The two major rivers, Gumara and Ribb, are of great resource importance to Fogera *Woreda*. These rivers are mainly used for irrigation during the dry season for the production of horticultural crops, mainly vegetables. Some farmers also use water pumps to produce vegetables, cereals and pulses. Accordingly, Gumara River- passes through Fuafuat Gajera, Kinti Merewa, Abagunde Sendega, Aba Kiros, Bebeks, Kuahr Mikael, Shena Kidist Hanna, Wagatera and Guramba PAs. On the other hand Reb River- Passes through Wetemb, Addis Betekerstian, Ribb Gebriel, Debasi Farta, Abana Kokit, Shaga, Naber and Shina PAs and ends into Lake Tana (see Appendix 4). However, the farming system of the study area is based on grain-livestock complex, the peasant associations noted on the Gumara River benefited a lot from the irrigation process and the farmers to produce three times a year.

#### 3.4.1. Production

According to the FWARDO (2010), cereal crops production officer, confession rice production has been introduced some five years ago in the Fogera plains and currently about 4,516 ha. of land is under rice cultivation using the X-Jigna variety. In the introduction of the rice into the area, for the first time, farmers have been hesitated to accept the rice meanwhile through stiff efforts by the office; they start to produce it and benefited a lot. Rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) grown during the main rainy season and is planted in June. A number of other crops such as *noug*, finger millet, *teff* are also produced in this area. During the dry season, mainly on those Ribb River bordering PAs, much of the area is left for livestock grazing. Meanwhile, horticultural crops production, particularly onion, is becoming a major agricultural activity during the dry season using irrigation in the Gumara River bordering PAs.

A diversified way of harvesting process is found. As a result the harvest is both a cereal (*Yebire Ehile*, such as *teff*, wheat, barley and so on) and while others harvested *Yeageda Ehile*, such as maize, sorghum. Specifically, in Kuahr Mikael PA, the production is prioritized as rice, horticulture (onion, pepper and tomatoes), oil crop (*Noug*), pulses (chickpea) and also *guaya* (chickling peas), whereas in Zeng Mikael PA the main production is *teff*, maize, wheat, sorghum, and also apiculture. As Bahir Dar is only 48 kms away from Kuahr Mikael PA, it is possible that this area could be a good source of tomato, onion and other vegetables to the town. Moreover,

farmers sold tomatoes, onion and other perishable vegetables to the nearby town, Woreta. On the other hand, those farmers, in Zeng Mikael PA, who have access to large farmland tend to diversify the crops, while those who have small amounts of land sow *teff* because its price per quintal is better than other crops and it is the major crop preferred for subsistence. *Guaya* (Grass pea, *Lathyrus sativus* L.) is also produced in the area.

### **3.4.2. Livestock**

The principal livestock reared in this area include cattle, mules, donkeys, horses, chickens, sheep and goats. Cats and dogs are found everywhere. Horses, mules, and donkeys are used as personal and material transportation sources. In addition, oxen are considered as farming assets, cows for milk, sheep and goat for meat.

More to the use as a source of food, the hides and skins of cattle and sheep are used in making “traditional” or culture borne products. In the past, people were using hides and skins of cattle and sheep for making of *jendi* (bed sheet), *akmada* (container of grains), *mechanya* (rope), *agoza* (spread for seats) and *lamenet* (spread used both for seats and as a bed sheet). Nowadays, these materials are being substituted by other materials intruded from urban areas. However, many people prefer to sell sheep skin to the hide market when the price is expensive and make it in a traditional fabric, while the price is cheap.

### **3.4.3. Fishery**

Fishing takes place all year round but the catch is very low during October and November. The annual catch from the motorized boat (which has its marketing assured via the co-operative) almost certainly exceeds that of all the other *tanqwa* (small boat) and traps used in the lake in Fogera *Woreda* (Gordon, et.al. 2007).

## **3.5. Land Tenure System: the Previous to Present**

The struggle over who controls the land has played a significant role in the history of Ethiopia and continues to do so (Berhanu & Fayera, 2005). Land is a fundamental requirement of this patriarchal system, for without it a man cannot fulfill his basic role of supporting his dependents

and providing a legacy for his children as a reward for their loyalty. But land is a scarce resource, and there are often more claims to land than that land can support. Thus, a father must train his children to be fierce and aggressive as a deterrent to those who would seek to expropriate parcels of their land (Reminick, 1976). Thus in the Amhara society, most kinds of socio-political as well as material relations were expressed and reflected through the distribution of rights over land. The marriage requests and arrangements were also interlinked with the possession of land. Since options other than farming activities are scarce in the rural communities of Amhara, land is the main, and in some instances the only, source of livelihoods.

In general, three periods can be distinguished in relation to land tenure policy and changes in the history of land tenure in Ethiopia generally and in Amhara Regional State particularly; i.e. the pre-1975 land tenure system, the rule of the *Derg* regime until 1991, and the period since 1991. It is strongly argued that the changes in land tenure system have its own effect in the life of community members in general and marriage requests as well as arrangements in particular.

### **3.5.1. The Pre-1975 Land Tenure System**

This period was coined with terms that were used to describe the land tenure system including “*rist*/kinship, communal, *diessa*/village, private, state, and church lands” (Berhanu & Fayera, 2005:5). Accordingly, the farming populations were divided into lay peasants (*chewa*), clergy (*kahinats*), tax paying peasants (*gebar*, sing) and non farming elite (*mekwanint*) (Hoben, 1973: 4).

The major form of ownership was the *rist* system in which all descendants, both male and female, of an individual founder were entitled to a share, and individuals had the right to use (a usufruct right) a plot of family land. *Rist* was hereditary, inalienable, and inviolable. No user of any piece of land could sell his or her share outside the family. Neither could he or she mortgage or bequeath the share as a gift, as the land belonged not to the individual but to the descent group (Hoben 1973; Yigremew, 2002, cited in Berhanu & Fayera, 2005; Crewett, et.al. 2008). The other major form of tenure was *gult* which is an ownership right acquired from the monarch or from provincial rulers who were empowered to make land grants. *Gult* owners collected tribute from the peasantry and, until 1974, exacted labor service as payment in kind from the peasants.

Until the government instituted salaries in the twentieth century, *gult* rights were the typical form of compensation for an official (ibid).

Thus, *gult* (fief) rights provided economic and political support for the elite and in their territorial aspect constituted the framework for the administration of the peasantry. *Rist* (land-use) rights, on the other hand, played an important role in the social and economic organization of the local community.

### **3.5.2. The Land Policy of the *Derg* Regime**

One of the first acts of the Marxist government (*Derg*) that took power in 1974 implemented a major land reform. The *Derg* abolished private ownership of land and declared that land to be the collective property of the Ethiopian people. Individual households had only user rights to land and the rights could not be transferred by sale, lease or mortgage (Berhanu & Fayera, 2005; Crewett et.al. 2008). As a result, the *Derg* nationalized the lands of nobilities, feudal landlords, and the churches and then redistributed these to farmers through the newly established peasant associations.

Consequently, the *rist* system was replaced by the government declaration of "land to the tiller" in 1975. Since then, the peasants have had land use rights. Moreover, the equal position and eligibility to public land had a major influence in the all rounded life of the community including marriage arrangement. This is a major turning point to many marriages in the peasant communities of the area because of the change of land use and tenure arrangements.

### **3.5.3. Land Policy since 1991**

According to the community elders and knowledgeable individuals' witnesses, in the area, in the year of 1996-97, four committees were set up at the *kebele* administration (PA) level to implement the redistribution of the land policy "fairly and justly." These were: (1) *yämäret yzota attari komite* (land-possession verifying committee); (2) *yäbetäsäb bzat attari komite* (family-size verifying committee); (3) *märetälday komite* (land-allotment committee); and (4) *qirreta sämi komite* (grievance hearing committee). Thus, land redistribution was carried out and efforts were made to give land to families without land. However, land being the scarcest resource; it had to

be taken from someone. The redistribution process was based on the assumption that some people had benefited illegally and unduly from their cooperation with the *Derg* regime. It, thus, decided to take the land to be redistributed from farmers who were considered to have benefited illegally or due to their social position and to have received more land than their due share during the past governments. These people were identified as *bureaucrats* and feudal remnants.

According to the community elders, during the 1997 land redistribution policy, '*Derg* bureaucrats' did not get the land they earned; it was given to female-headed households and the younger members of the community; most were happy. In addition divorced women get equal opportunity too. Moreover, 'Feudalists' got land back from the peasant association during this period.

Thus, the study identified that the land policy which was issued three times had its own influences on the arrangement of marriage in general and early marriage in particular.

Consequently the rights of woman, regards to land, in a society determined by their position in the household. Thus women rights to use land are associated with their position in relation to men-as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters (Gray and Kevane 1999). Hence, land is a sensitive issue and a backbone to sustain their live. Girls have forced to marry at an early age for this purpose. So losing such status led their life unstable and socially insecure. It is worth remembering that girls and/ or women do not have any power by themselves. As a result, in order to get a power and status in a society they need to have a husband. That is why land and marriage arrangement interlinked each other in the peasant communities.

### **3.6. Social Structure and Organization**

#### **3.6.1. Kinship, Marriage and Descent**

##### **3.6.1.1. Kinship**

Kinship formations have started with a man married to a woman (Tuupainen, 1970; Sweetman 2003). Accordingly, the kinship actors at the beginning were three in number: two parents and their offspring. In all human societies, a father is regarded by law, custom and morals as an indispensable element of the procreative group. In addition, this biological foundation of kinship becomes invariably a cultural and not merely a natural fact (Malinowski, 1930). Thus, kinship is

a major indicator of certain individuals' relatedness within a group (Olson & DeFrain, 2000). In general, kinship is both "connections and disconnections and, thus, necessarily involves the cultural creation of differences as well as similarity" (Tsing & Yanagisako, 1983). Levi-Strauss further argued that kinship groups were simply units in a system of alliances made or expressed by marriage (Fox, 1967; Peletz, 1995). The rights and duties the members have toward each other are parts of the system (Tuupainen, 1970).

Furthermore, the nature of kinship terminologies must be spurious, because the plain fact is that classificatory terminologies do not exist and never could have existed. For instance, the major rationale for functional anthropologist is, therefore, to understand what kinship really means to the native (Malinowski, 1930) because kinship concepts describe kinds of kinship groups and the norms that govern marital forms, family structure and organization, inheritance, authority and residence (Olson & DeFrain, 2000). Thus, specificity of kinship system is central to understanding the process of socialization (Dube, 2001). Thus the study used kinship concept from the emic point of throughout the course of analysis of data.

However, kinship is not merely a moral code, but also provides the organizing principles which govern the recruitment and placement of individuals in social groups, formation of the family and household, residence at marriage, resource distribution; including inheritance, and obligations and responsibilities of individual members of the group in the business living (Dube, 2001). Accordingly, "kinship relations are social relations predicated upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into a complete (i.e. mature) social person" (Peletz, 1995). Thus, kinship system is central to understanding the process of socialization (Dube, 2001). Moreover, Fox (1967) claimed, a 'kinless man was, at best, a man without social position; at worst, he was a dead man'.

Consequently, for the understanding of any aspect of the social life of an African people, like, economic, political or religious, it is essential, mainly to anthropologists, to have a through knowledge of their system of kinship and marriage (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1970). Moreover, the institution of marriage is closely related to kinship and the family (Nwannobi, 1992) and also enables a child to have a socially recognized mother and father (Bohannan & Middleton, 1968;

Nwannobi, 1992). As the ethnographic data found, this social recognition also includes step children's. As a result, though births outside marriage were rare and inadvisable, however, when they did occur, those children were grown up with their parents, mainly with their father's house, as "*yenjera lij*".

On the other hand, there were religious kinship relationship in Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs. As a result the institution of "fictive-kinship relationship established through godparenthood and childhood, locally known as *abäləğ*, is commonly practiced by all Orthodox Christians" (Guday, 2005). In general, kinship implies relations in blood (biological kinship), descent (jural or legal kinship) and marriage (agnatic kinship) (Holy, 1996; Peil & Oyeneye, 1998).

### **3.6.1.2. Marriage**

Marriage looms important in the life of a society, and thus merits so much anthropological attention, precisely because it is not merely an affair of kinship and simply the execution of the rule but the strategy and logic whereby societies insure their future (LiPuma, 1983). Levi- Strauss captured of marriage system in terms of elementary and complex structures with a conceptualization of the underpinning exchanges. Thus, "Marriage exchange" in its double sense refers to the flow of unions between exchanging social units and to other transactions which accompany marriage, such as bridewealth. These latter transactions may be an adjunct to the transfer of rights in persons, or may facilitate long-term cycles of generalized exchange. Thus, such exchange ceases to be of "structural" significance (Buchler & Selby, 1968; Keesing, 1975; Strathern, 1984; Barnard & Spencer, 2002; Carsten, 2004) and each individual derives his/her main social identity from his/her membership in the group (Holy 1976: 108).

For a first marriage, elders who are chosen by the parents of the prospective groom are sent to the parents of the prospective bride to request their consent to the marriage. As a result, for every marriage arrangement between the two spouses, their relationship counted upto the seventh generation. It is not allowed to marry each other below the seventh generation. Any sexual mating between persons in fictive relationship upto seventh age group is considered to incest

taboo. Thus, according to Claude Levi-Strauss, marriage is the structure of exchange resulting from the incest prohibition (Moore, & Waite, 1981; Barnard, & Spencer 1996).

Marriage can be seen to be an interaction in which each marriage party is accepted by the other. In any social interaction, each group in a society identifies itself in cultural terms with respect to descent and status (Fisher, 1983). A marriage alliance expresses to the rest of society both a reciprocal acceptance of the other party's claims and a bond of identity between them. The actual wedding ceremony often serves as a transforming rite which draws the identities of the principals even closer together, although the parameters of the change depend on the culture and situation (ibid).

From the point of view of indigenous law and custom, a marriage is to be regarded primarily as an alliance between two kinship groups and only in a secondary aspect a union between two individual persons (Phillips & Morris, 1971). Thus, the indigenous institution of marriage can only be understood if it is viewed as an integral part of the kinship system as a whole (ibid).

### **3.6.1.3. Descent**

It is clear that the principle of descent defined here is a means of allocating membership of segments of society. That is, an individual is placed within the society into which he is born by reference to his membership of a segment of it. It underlies the allocation of status, including political privileges and liabilities, and often legitimizes rights to various forms of property (Holy, 1976: 109). Accordingly, in any social interaction, each group in a society identifies itself in cultural terms with respect to descent and status (Fisher, 1983).

For Levi-Strauss, it was marriage rather than descent that was central to the understanding of kinship (Carsten, 2004). Although not all people have a concept of descent, they all recognize culturally a domain which "we call" kinship (Holy, 1996).

### **3.6.2. Gender Socialization**

Children, male/female or both, are involved in herding of livestock and in helping parents with domestic work. At the age of 6, girls have forced to help their mothers in the household duties, whereas, a boy is obliged to attend the day to day activities of his father in the farming area and he can carry the ploughing materials step-by-step and able to carry the full oxen material after he aged 7. These materials are *maresha* (plough head), *mofer* (plough beam) and *kenber* (yoke), combined and pulled by two oxen. Thus, children in rural areas are considered as economically useful from about the age of 6.

Women and girls are responsible for fetching water from the nearest possible spring, river or other source. Selling grain, tomatoes and other vegetables in the market, livestock herding, and taking grain to the nearby mill are done by both sexes. In addition to the household responsibilities, women have duties of land preparation, sowing, hoeing, weeding, harvesting and livestock production.

There are socially constructed roles for both women and men in the studied communities, which may be regarded as gender role (referring to the expected behavior, act, duty and responsibility of women and men, which are specified by different socio-cultural factors). The interaction of these factors determines the clothing, acting and working behavior of both men and women. Thus, ploughing is a sole male activity. Other agricultural activities such as weeding, harvesting, and transporting crops and livestock activities are usually carried out communally within the household and can be done mutually by men and women. However, according to Bevan (1997), men are currently much more central in subsistence food production in Ethiopia than elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **3.6.3. Women's and Girls' Position**

For every individual, brothers and sons are more valuable than sisters and daughters. This does not mean that sisters and daughters may not be loved as much as brothers and sons. However, a girl values her brother more than her sister because the former will do much for her throughout life, while the latter will “disappear” after marriage. Similarly, a woman values her sons more than her daughters because the former will be her major source of support in her own homestead

(compound). Indeed, a woman's position in her husband's home is not consolidated unless she produces at least one son (Gupta 1987, cited in Astone, et.al., 1999). Levi-Strauss further argued that social interaction and exchange may produce resources (i.e., social capital) that are available to be used for further ends (ibid). Thus, women are primarily responsible for child care (ibid) and after bearing a child, “the woman is no longer a woman” (Hanmer & Itzin, 2000; UNICEF, Apr. 2005) in what ever the age she has (UNICEF, 2001, Apr. 2005).

In general, the universal female role in child socialization and the universal experience by which girls are socialized by women to particularistic and personalistic character have been invoked to account for the confinement of women to the domestic sphere (Engles, 1973; Quinn 1977; O’Kelly, 1980; Kammeyer, 1987) and the major portion of a woman is to “ruled the house” (Engles et.al., 1973). Thus, woman's social status and the sexual role accorded her in society are related facts which find expression in the rules and attitudes governing marital and extra-marital relations (Opler, 1943).

As soon as she is able, a girl starts caring for younger siblings, helps in food preparation, and spends long hours hauling water and fetching firewood. As she grows older, she is valued for the role she will play in establishing kinship bonds through marriage to another family, thereby strengthening the community status of her family. She is taught to be subservient, as a disobedient daughter is an embarrassment to her family.

### 3.7. Capital

The community members regarded an individual whether poor or rich based on different characteristics or capital indications. Accordingly, Bevan (1997) briefly explains the criteria that Ethiopian peasants use for deciding wealth status based on the following wealth indicators:

- **Economic Capital:** an indication of productive factors (private, collective and public).
- **Social Capital:** an indication of relationships, organization, management of the family, and occupational role in a community.
- **Cultural Capital:** gains through norms, beliefs, values, knowledge, information, ideology (e.g. the status of women) in a society.
- **Political Capital:** is an indicator of interests, position, solidarity and mobilization of the law.

- **Coercive Capital:** a major pointer on an individual's strength, weaponry and fear.
- **Personal Capital:** is an indication of personality, skills, experience and charisma of an individual, and
- **Environmental Capital:** is the major indicator to the preservation and maintenance of natural resources, climate, altitude, degradation, pollution, and diseases.

Thus, the aforementioned capitals were major turning points to an individual to get a position, recognition, power and status in a community. Accordingly, children of the community are recruited based on the above accommodation of capital by their parents to become rich and wealthy in one or many of the capitals. However, poor household farmers do not have any capital in a community and even ploughing by *mekenajo* (an oxen sharing process). In addition, their wives also prepare *aräqi* (distilled liquor), *ṭälla* (local beer) to sustain the wellbeing of the family.

### 3.8. Local Institutions and Organizations

#### Labor Work Arrangements

Largely men and in some instances women in the poor household families were recruited as a labor worker in the rich or wealthy peasant farming homes. The agreements between the two parties mostly with men are about on the farming duties, whereas the agreement with female is on the household responsibilities. Thus, concurrence is under the grouping of *baqurṭ*, *ərboṅña* (ərbo), and *siso* (*sisoṅña*).

*baqurṭ*: It is an arrangement when a given household does not have any male member to assist the father in farm work, or when all children, especially male ones, are sent to school and their parents want them to give emphasis to their education, or when children are self-sufficient and when parents have no one to support them. As a result *baläqurṭ araš* (the farm servant) works for an individual landholder at a predetermined wage. In this arrangement, the farm servant (*araš*) lives with the employer's household and is provided with food and a sleeping place. The hired tiller is requested to perform other activities over and above the farm-work. Payment for this kind of work is based on the agreement of the two parties on *bərr* or crop (in cash or in kind).

*Ərboňña* (*ərbo*) (one-fourth): this is a deal whereby a farm servant is employed in the household for doing farm work activities and other activities in the employer's house. His shelter and food is with his employer and takes 1/4<sup>th</sup> of his employer's yield at harvest.

*Sisoňña* (*siso*) (one-third) is a common arrangement for wage labour. The major role of the *sisoňña* is harvest and farming activity and he never lives with his master. Thus, the agreement is held on a specific ploughing to take 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the final product (harvest).

## **Communal Work and Living Condition**

*Däbo* or *wänfäl* (communal work) is an institution which takes place if a peasant is unable to work his/ her own land (due to illness, old age, lack of oxen, or being a woman) prepares a feast and receives assistance in the form of human labour and/or oxen power from friends, relatives, neighbors, or *mahäbär* co-members. Thus, it is organized for ploughing/sowing, weeding or harvesting.

In the previous years, people used to keep their livestock in a cattle kraal, locally known as *bärät*. The *bärät* is found in the residing room of the family. However, today most of the people keep their livestock in a section of their houses or in separate houses which are built for animals only. Most of the current *bäräts* are former household residing rooms. In addition, the majority of the community members have their own tin-corrugated roof houses (*yäqorqoro bet*).

## **Religious Celebration**

Since almost all community members in the studied PAs are Orthodox Tewahido Christians, there are festivals on all major Orthodox Christian holidays like *Meskel* (the day for the commemoration of the founding of the True Cross), *Timket* (Epiphany), *Genna* (Christmas) and *Fasika* (Easter). New Year is also celebrated as the day of Saint Yohannes in the beginning day of every year, i.e. *Meskerem* 1<sup>st</sup>.

The most prominent monthly religious days are: on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month is *Lideta*; 3<sup>rd</sup> *Bata*; 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month *Abo*; 7<sup>th</sup> day *Sostu Sellassie*; 12<sup>th</sup> *St. Mikael*; 16<sup>th</sup> *Kidanemihet*; 19<sup>th</sup> *St. Gabrael*; 21<sup>st</sup> *St. Mary*; 23<sup>rd</sup> *Georges*; 24<sup>th</sup> *Teklehaymanot*; 27<sup>th</sup> *Medhane Alem*; 29<sup>th</sup> *Beale Egziabher*.

Moreover, people have the strict belief that if they go to the field on these religious holidays, they will be punished by God.

### **Community Based Organizations (CBO's)**

*Senbete* and *Mahber* are voluntary associations of farmers established in the name of certain Christian Saints. Accordingly, *Senbete* is a Sunday feast, whereas *Mahber* is held on the name of different saints. Hence, St. Sillasse, St. Mikael, St. Gabriel, St. Georges and St. Medihanialem or *Behale Egiziyabiher* are mainly regarded as men's *Mahber*. On the other hand *Bata*, *Kidist Kidanemihret*, and *Maryam* are regarded as women's *Mahber*. Thus, the former *Mahbers* celebrated on the shade of trees in the church compound, whereas the latter *mahbers* are held in the house.

### **“Traditional” Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

The villagers prefer to resolve disputes through the local institution of *Shimgilina* (council of elders) rather than going to the formal government courts. Community elders and religious leaders are playing critical roles for the achievement of *Shimgilina*. The *Shimgilina* is carried out in the social gathering days mainly on Sundays after the mass church ceremony. Thus, it is obvious to see, every Sunday in the church, *shemagilewoch* and conflicting parties in different space in solving conflict or disagreements including marriage related problems.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE NATURE OF EARLY MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS IN FOGERA *WOREDA*

### 4.1. The Changing and Hidden Patterns of Early Marriage Arrangements

The ancient Amhara proverb avowed the marriage process of the region, "The seed goes to the soil, the soil never comes to the seed" meaning the elders of the prospective husband's family go to the homestead of the girl's family to inquire into the possibility of an alliance. It also means that a man's "seed" can be planted only after the "soil," i.e., the woman's sex, has been "plowed" by the man's instrument of procreation. In both farming and marriage, a man's plowing of a parcel of land, especially virgin land, gives him certain usufructory rights over that territory (Reminick, 1976: 753).

After several months' preparation, when the marriage necessities have been accumulated, the wedding ceremonies begin with the couple's presence at a great feast held at the bride's home. A similar feast is also set at the groom's homestead, where his parents separately entertain their relatives and friends. In the evening, after all the guests are satisfied, the time called *gabiča* (wedding ceremony) arrives. The *gabiča*, wedding ceremonies, take place after the end of harvest season and religious fasting months; that is conducted mainly on the months of January or in April (Alemante, 2004: 24) in a wedding place called *čagula*.

Virginity of a girl before marriage is highly regarded and anticipated by both her and her husband's family. It is also made public during the wedding ceremony and tribute is given to the girl through some celebrations for her success in maintaining her virginity. Accordingly, after the preliminary sexual intercourse, both of her husband's family members and the *mize* sing the ritual *keylä säbere* or *bir ambar seberelwe*. This ceremony is only held when the spouses are in the same age category. However, there is no such celebration and sexual intercourse in the practice of early marriage.

The arrangement for provision of gifts during the marriage interaction and the procedure differs from the olden time; thus the traditional gifts exchanged by parents before the marriage in the study PAs have multifarious features. Accordingly, it is too difficult to easily understand and make generalization about the marriage gifts. As Bossen (1988) stated that one difficulty in analyzing and generalizing about marriage activities is the variability of marriage practices. Another is the fact that in many societies, marriage is not defined as a single event, ceremony, or one time economic transaction. It may be established slowly, by increments, with varying rights and complex obligations, and it may be established without any formal transfer of property. Moreover, Hoben (1973:49) explained as:

*Cattle are the most important form of property, but horses, donkey, mules, sheep, and small sums of money may also be given. Initially the formal agreement of property is made outdoors in neutral ground and is witnessed by a number of elders. At a later date, after the wedding, the elders could gather again to view the livestock in question and make adjustments for minor discrepancies in their apparent worth.*

According to community elders and grand parents, in the old days, since the farmers used to produce a lot of crops, it was very easy to have their children get married in a great feast, because, at that period, a *qunna* (large grass basket holding about 10kg) of grain cost just ten cents, an ox could be bought for just 20 and 30 barr. Money was hard to come by then and food grain was cheap. Nowadays, it is very difficult and needs much money to organize marriage feast, thus either the feasts is held in a simple manner or the only wealthiest persons of the society could set a great marriage feast.

Consequently the arrangement of marriage is traced back in the far past as being very expensive which demands a huge expense from both the bride and the groom side. During the grand parents generation the impact of religion and politics also geared the arrangement of marriage. Community members were also tempted to arrange marriage with the well to do to share wealth and guarantee social dignity. The society also positively approved of marriage with the land lords and local officials for their high social status. In general marriage would be arranged by families claiming high social status than the right couples working on realities that would bring them together. In fact as community elders and secondary literatures argued, the influence of religion and politics reduced although it was not proved by a reliable research.

According to the findings of this study the marriage feast used to be extravagant in olden times since people had better economic level compared to families at present. Early marriage feast would also be organized in public without trying to disguise anything. Currently early marriage is carried out underneath a certain social or family reason. The feast is also lesser which is relatively cheaper due to lower economic background of community members than the previous years. However the decreasing of wealth and income of community members through time needs additional investigation.

In this research three generations has been referred to as grand parents' generation, parents' generation and daughter generation which are considered the target segment of a particular family. Thus grand parents' generation of this study breakdown includes elders above the age of 65 years of age and who have grand children. Parents' generation in this study is considered as people above the age of 45 years and who have married or proposed children for marriage. Daughters' generation in this study is viewed as girls under the age of 18 who are considered, from etic point of view, as early married girls. They are also included in this study as case participants.

#### **4.1.1. Grand Parents' Generation**

The "traditional" marriage alliance occurs between two families of relatively equal wealth and status that have children ready for marriage (Reminick, 1976: 756). The marriageable ages, in the imperial times, for the bride was ten to thirteen and eighteen to twenty years for the groom (Hoben, 1973) because it was the tradition to marry-off girls at their teens and boys at their twenties (Levine, 1965, in Alemante 2004). Thus boys for the first marriage in their late teens or early twenties; and girls at twelve or thirteen, ideally before menarche (Hoben, 1973).

Most of the time, the age gaps between the spouses were in favor of the husband's side. Neither the bride's family nor the brides try to do away with this domination. Thus, the marriage arrangement process and the establishment of *goğgo* (hut) were based on the plan and good will of the husband and his parents. In relation to the issue at hand, grand parents of the community through different ethnographic methods uttered the condition in their own words as:

*In our time (during King Hailesellasié period) a bride had to be much younger than her husband. Moreover, the marriage agreement was held between the bride's and groom's*

*parents and all the favors went to the groom's side. It is also obvious that the two partners should be in a huge age gap, thus the age gap of the spouses favors the husband a great deal. These benefits were basically as compensation for his gift and sharing of land. In addition, a wife was supposed to protect him as he got too old; to give many births throughout her life and to respect him in all instances. Thus respect is a basic theme of relation, because there is no worse disrespect, in our culture, than to be disrespected by one's wife (Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PA's, January-February 2010).*

At that time, it was expected that marriages were arranged by parents and were blessed by religious leaders and the marrying partners were obliged to follow this guideline. As a result, the main rationales of parents on the marriage arrangement process were getting a good child-in-law and family member, captured through religious dogma and prerequisites.

During the grandparents' generation, religious and political factors determined the marriage arrangement process in general and early marriage arrangement in particular. For these reasons, early marriage was practiced as the tool to ascend their hierarchies in the upper classes of the society (Alemante, 2004). It is, therefore, primarily designed to hold on political power and to channel available resources to the dominant groups of the society.

#### **4.1.2. Parents' Generation**

The marriage arrangement procedure is almost similar within the grandparents' generation, however, in this period, the political and religious actors were not decisive. Before the 1974 Revolution, religion had a significant role in the social structure (Alemante, 2004) and after the overthrow of the Emperor; the power of religion in marriage arrangement fell down. Alemante (2004:73) admitted the situation that "with the progressive inculcation of socialist ideology in to the community, the force of religion diminished on marriage". Religious fathers also encouraged early marriage since the Emperor's regime. Such intervention was carried out through local priests applauding marriage of daughters at their early age.

Consequently, the feast services were decreasing in quality and quantity. As a result, before the wedding day the selected village elders called *ama* ◇ (who negotiate the bridal gift, and exchanges of properties, land and cattle between the groom's and bride's family members) make indenture between the two families. On the wedding day, the bride was wrapped in traditional

white clothing that hides her face and she was carried from her parents' *goğgo* on the day of her wedding in great ceremonial features.

Since the collapse of the *Derg* regime, the community members practiced early marriage extensively again and nobody asked them anything concerning early marriage. Because of insecurity during that time, the challenge and confrontation of parents about the early marriage arrangement process stopped, as Alemante (2004) characterized the period as the manifestation of the social, economic and political crises that were accumulated for a decade. In this regard, one of the key informants in Kuahr Mikael narrated the situation as follows:

*I remember that in the Derg regime, the peasant association leaders imprisoned parents who had arranged early marriage for two days. Then, they were released after their confession of not doing the act. However, the act did not continue for long by the government and early marriage was extremely free enabling us to marry our children at any age. However, in the current days it is too hard to arrange early marriage to our children publicly; as a result we organize it in a hidden manner (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Consequently, the marriage age of both girls and boys dropped through time, and hence, the age at marriage of girls dropped from 12 to 9 years and boys from 18 to 12 years (Alemante, 2004). Similarly, the study of Guday (2005) also stated the same result and found that “the age at first marriage is getting down from 10 to 7 years and from 12 to 9 years” to girls and boys respectively. Although the fact that more investigation and in-depth study is needed to prove the above facts, it was obvious that unrest during the *Derg* regime fueled the prevalence of early marriage arrangements for the government became lenient in controlling the situation.

### **4.1.3. Children's Generation**

The trend of marriage arrangement in general, and early marriage arrangement in particular are changing in form and pattern during children's generation. Here, the basic notion of marriage requirement, i.e. public attendance and witnesses of individuals in the marriage arrangement process has been hidden and only the will of marrying children's parents are taken as major criterion. As a result, children have been married off in a hidden manner based on the good will of their parents.

Since, the early marriage arrangement process is held in a “secret” and hidden manner, an early married girl, unlike the previous generations, does not have and make her own *goğğo* immediately after her marriage. Thus, she may have her own *goğğo* when either she has become pregnant or when it is believed that she reached the exact “marriage age”. Since this “marriage age” is societal and culture-specific, it is not obvious, to be at her age of 18. Accordingly, societal age of marriage is the stage by which society considers a girl as ready for marriage. This is not often determined based on how old a girl is but it is viewed from the point of view of the daughters’ parents’ economic background, communal popularity of her parents and girl’s physical reality. As a result, it takes months or years for a bride to build her own *goğğo* after her marriage. However, when she gives birth, she builds *in a new goğğo* and lives with her husband in her in-laws’ homestead, because she is considered as a woman, and no more treated as a “girl”.

Though anonymity of results is found, most of the early married girls emphasized that it is better if a girl is married in her interest and at the instance when she was mature enough to manage her family and to live in harmony with her husband’s family as well as to finish her childhood time and be able to care of her children in a better way. Thus, girls prefer to be married, at later age, by their own will rather than based on the preference of their parents. But they want to respect the will and promise of their parents and accept it without questioning them. They trust their parents and strongly believe that they did their level best towards the fate of their children’s life as well as the honor of the family. Accordingly, married girls stated the situation, during the focus group discussion, in their own words as follows:

*We live in a very stressful and controlled condition mainly by our in-laws, and by the objection to give birth at an early age. So, our fate is on the hands of our husbands and in-laws. We have no option to lead our life and to determine our destiny by ourselves. Worst of all, if we get pregnant and give birth, the delivery process will be held in a secret manner because we might contact with health professionals who report it to the government and that is hard to our husbands. So, the delivery is carried out by traditional midwives in the community. In addition, in the husband’s family home, we are treated as one member of the house, rather than as a wife, because nobody wants to know about our relation. Everything is secretive and we find ourselves powerless. But, it is fair to mention that we feel respected and recognized from the community members who know about our hidden arranged marriage. For instance, they congratulate and tell us we will be fine and in a good position in the future. When we compare our status with our age mates, we are more respected by the community members and full of future hopes (Zeng Mikael, February 2010).*

Consequently such hidden marriage of girls begins with the promise of marrying parents to marry their respective children to each other. Then the wedding ceremonies will be conducted underneath a certain social or family celebration. The thinking and stress of girls about their marriage begins during the early negotiation. However parents are often determined in convincing of their daughters that the marriage arranged to the daughter's own wellbeing. Then the girls moved to their proposed husband in-laws home after one or two months to discuss the early marriage. After their arrival at their husband in-laws house, they would be treated as relatives of the family which has its own difficulties for the new brides. Despite all the odds the early married girls try to put up with the situations that come along in order to show respect to their parents by paying the price and doing all it takes.

The study further showed that marriage was arranged between the equals, i.e., in status, wealth, economic condition, educational level and so on. Thus, it is very rare to have a marriage with the lower levels of the social strata. Here, it is worth mentioning that the situation is better when the lower level is daughters than sons. As a result, most of the parents in lower level need to marry off their children with the higher level social group family members, such as to marry with wealthy, rich, educated (mainly religious), respected and powerful individuals of the community. Similarly, on the mentioned issue Bartz and Nye (1970) stated that the lower a social class of a boy's or a girl's parents, the more likely early marriage will occur. Consequently, parents of a lower social level status strive to change and upgrade their position by marrying off their children, mainly daughters, to the upper level family members.

## **4.2. The Current Nature and Prevalence of Early Marriage Arrangement**

### **4.2.1. Mode of Mate Selection**

During the marriage arrangement process parents know each other for a long time, and the spouses also know each other as 'friends' through the common relationship and acquaintances of their parents. Hence the study argue with the explanation of Popenoe & Whitehead (2004) that the most likely way to find a future marriage partner is through an introduction by family, friends, or acquaintances.

Furthermore, the results from FGD and key informant interview with community elders and knowledgeable individuals revealed that early marriage is arranged mainly by rich families. In addition to the high requests from community members to marrying off their children, rich parents are in need of an heir for their wealth. Thus, wealth of a family has twofold impacts on the girls' life, i.e. not letting them to attend their 'formal education', because of many household duties and burdens, and to marry at their early age. Most of the wealthiest parents saw 'formal education' from an economical point of view. However, poor parents have nothing to give and invest for their children's marriage and that nobody asks and needs a girl from a poor family for marriage.

Parents are supposed to execute this mate selection right and approve the marriage partner of their children. Thus, they give utmost importance to the emotions of their daughters' interests and feelings. To this end, the more a parent, mainly the household head is interested in the child, and his or her family, the more a child is supposed to be a child in-law. In other words, parents come into conclusion and admission after examining the merits and demerits of their choice as well as the future fate of their children. On the other hand, children are supposed to respect their parents' choices since their parents have huge experience and are expected to make favors to their children.

Most of the parents, in key informant as well as in-depth interviews and FGDs, avowed that marriage arrangement for girls at an early age is the appropriate procedure in the study area. Even those informants, who showed their refusal to marry off their children at an early age, were those in a "low" economic position and social status. One of the FGD discussant Ashebir Damte, a 75 years old elder from Kuahr Mikael PA during the discussion asserted the issue at hand in his own words as follows:

*I am very poor, and I even plough by borrowing oxen from others or by mekenajo. I can not think of giving my daughters away for marriage because families put their request forward only to the wealthy daughters. The wealthiest parents as well as their daughters are closer to be requested or proposed for marriage. Community members are; therefore, propose marriage with daughters of the rich parents. These rich families do not have problems in handling the expenses of the marriage feast, grant and parental gifts. Since my three daughters, because of my poverty, are unlikely to be proposed for marriage I have decided to send them to school to pursue their education.*

factor to get a social recognition and respect, parents taking care and give due attention for mate selection to their children. One of the informants, during an in-depth interview, asserted on the situation as:

*Glory to God, I am happy in my life. I am at the age of 50. I was married at the age of 11. My husband is a priest, 18 years older than me. I gave birth, for the first time when I was 13. Thanks to God, I have 10 children. My husband and I were together since our marriage. Now, we are able to see our grandchildren. Accordingly, 6 of our children have their own goğgo. I think this is the ultimate success in our lives (Early married grandmother, Zeng Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Similarly, most of the parents preferred to marry off their children, mainly girls, at their early age. Thus, it is proper action to marry off their daughters at any age and nobody dared to claim this action, except the parents. It is also common saying by parents that *bälge man aggäbaw* (who dares to speak on the behalf of my child). Accordingly, they do not fear the legal instruments and intervention of different bodies and usually they are so confident on their daughters. In addition, parents do not bother asking their children's opinion before finalizing the marriage. Since, family values are prescribed and respected in the local communities.

Hence, parents who arranged early marriage could not try to consider the rights of their early married daughters. The learning opportunities, marriage mate selection and other life related issues were determined by the parents. Thus, there is no space for a girl's voice to be heard. Moreover, community members see the action of early marriage from their cultural point of view and perceive it as a "correct and acceptable practice of a society". Nonetheless, the words, linked to describe the practice of early marriage, like; "harmful", "illegal", "crime", "backward", and "traditional" do not have any value in the studied peasant communities. Even, those mothers and grandmothers, who got married at their early age and had faced health problems, could not take the practice as a "harmful" practice and they had married off their daughters at their early age. Similarly, one female parent, Minalush Shega aged 39, from Kuahr Mikael PA who has arranged early marriage asserted during the interview the situation in her own words as follows:

*My child (daughter) was too young to make decisions on her mate selection and marriage arrangement. This is our (parents) duty to select and approve our children-in-laws, not she and nobody else orders us. This needs a big decision and it is a big deal. It is not a game, you play and win; it is life, which deserves something special, it is a generation formation. I do not allow her to make "my kinship so bad". I and my family were in this position because of my parents' effort. Now, I have a responsibility to do so. My daughter does not understand anything, she is too young to decide on such*

*matters, and she is good in accepting our (parents) order (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Moreover, female parents or mothers during FGD agreed with the aforementioned idea and confessed that children's preference in mate selection is a strange and unthinkable procedure. Thus, everything is arranged by parents and no other body is allowed to play such a role. This is a family matter and no one asks and wants to ask like that. They elaborated the issue as follows:

*It is very strange and rare to make a meeting and selection between the marrying spouses. This is not a good tradition, and children have their role as we have such roles, like spouses selection. Their role is accepting our (parents') order. The family heads decide and reach on the arrangement and the selection of marrying children. This is our custom, nobody violates it and we do not want our children in a bad manner. They (children) must be shaped by us (parents) (Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs, January 2010)*

Early married girls shared the above views and stated that their parents are neither willing to accept their feeling about mate selection nor they allowed them to discuss on their marriage. Thus, accepting the choice and procedure of marriage arranged by their parents' was the only option girls were left with. If they were not in cooperation with their parents, parental and communal isolation and cursing could follow. Furthermore, the case mentioned below illustrates as follows:

*I was forced to marry at the age of 12, when I was a grade 2 student. At that time, my parents neither allowed me to continue my education nor agreed with my husband to do so. Thus, I was voiceless and had little to say about my marriage. My father and my mother were in favor of giving me away for marriage at my early age. They are so happy about their action (in-depth interview with early married girl at the age of 12, Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*We were forced to marry at an early age. None of our family members gave us an option about our marriage. They found the option and decision they made as the only way of life. Initially, they did not allow most of us to attend a formal schooling. If they do so the pressure is too high on them during the marriage arrangement process. In addition, they do not need to let us expose in public sphere. They fear that our education may pave a way to have a bad character. They want to nurture us until our death. Even they pledged us since our birth time to marriage. As a result, it is unthinkable and shameful for them not to keep their promise. Nobody wants to be called qalā bāla (unreliable) (FGD's with early married girls, Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Fundamentally, the selection of the marrying partners in particular and their families in general is determined by the children's family's position and status in the community. As a result, a groom from a poor family is not confident enough to ask the wealthiest family's daughter for marriage. In some instances, the reverse may be true and low positioned family girls were asked by the high position family boys. One of the key informants witnessed the issue at hand as "if you are from a brave family you will marry and be asked for marriage from a brave family; a poor family to a poor family; a wealthy family to a wealthy one and so on. Thus, the equal status and position of an individual or equal matching determines the marriage arrangement pattern.

Early marriage arranging parents have lots of knowledge and experience in their life than their children; whatever they do is just for the betterment and good life of their children. It is really a very critical time for the parents to do a favor to their children and confirm their destiny too. Furthermore, in the early marriage arrangement process, early marriage arranging parents are able to get the advantage of and to check the background, status, wealth, position and other basic situations their child-in-laws as well as their family members. Additionally, if conflict or disagreement arises between the marrying partners, families take a lion's share of responsibility and show no hesitation to give support to their children. Thus, children are not in a social and parental position to be blamed for any mistake in marriage. It is also obvious that during arranging the marriage, all the roles and responsibilities of each partner should be clearly stated so that the assumptions and expectations of the parents and community members are clearly defined.

In relation to the issue at hand Ato Dagnachew Kinde, 66- year- old elder from Kuahr Mikael PA, acknowledged that parents never do mistake about their children and could not make wrong decisions and voiced the situation as:

*I think, parents are always right, and they love their children very much, so whatever they do for their children are right for them. Moreover, parents are more knowledgeable in the social life and cultural issues of the community. I think that is always the best option to maintain the order of God and preserves our social customs and traditions. No one is urged to marry over night; it needs enough time to know the marrying partners on one hand and their family members on the other hand. Thus, nobody, but parents, knows about which one is a perfect mate for their children because children may not take wise decisions on their mate selection and lives. Thus, I do not have any doubt with parents to judge on the fate of their children. Most of early arranged marriages always*

*stay in a good position of accumulating social and material capitals as well as they are more successful in their long term continuity. (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Since, marriage is a means and a way to form alliance between two families; nobody dares start this long term relationship by letting the children select their own marriage partner. Thus, it is a matter of family and, mostly community members and parents have a better and commendable understanding of the community life and social order. This is the basic scheme that they hold impressive power to decide on their children's marriage and a life partner selection. It is just, therefore, to say that to the opinion of the people of the study area parents select a far better life partner for their children than the children themselves do. The responsibility for the marrying spouses lies with both the bride's and groom's parents, since they are responsible for their children's fate, on the one hand, and their family line, on the other hand. Hence, after the marrying partners' families have agreed upon the marriage arrangement procedure and requirements, it is the obligation of both the agreeing families to attentively follow and control the behavior and socialization process of the children, thus they carefully look at to them. Accordingly when a girl is pledged for marriage with a man, the duty of looking after her entire situation including meeting her needs falls on the hands of her in-laws as well as her own parents. This marriage pledged families do not only provide the girl with her need but they also watch her in order to discipline and control her behavior.

Hence, parents want their children to be happy in their marriage; everything is adjusted and arranged, for a long, before the marriage day for the reason that separations of the two partners after marriage is a great shame to both families. It is also strongly believed that arranged marriages lasted longer because of the very fact that girls were socialized to remain submissive and non-refusals of the family order.

In general, parents do the selection with a view that children's selection is often wrong. Thus, parents' are extremely considerate of family line, economic and social status while they arrange marriages to their children. These criteria are set by parents in order to pick the right partner for their children in terms of the social perception, attitude and common consciousness of the society about that particular person. Families also believe that their family line will be affected among

the society in the case of wrong selection, so they have a very careful scrutiny of the issue to maintain an acceptable kinship line. Moreover, they strictly stick to the conventional social order that states who should marry who, and so on. In this regard, parents would not like to be embarrassed and pointed fingers at due to the wrong choice of mate for their children. The following case explains the above discussed points:

### ***Case 1: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and Parental Mate Selection***

The early marriage arrangement of Tadelech is seized when she was 8 years old. Her father, Ato Wuletaw, made an agreement and promised her to his friend's son when she was born. At that time, her father called her as 'a wife of Molalign', the would-be husband of Tadelech. On the other hand, Molalign's family members had had their own contribution in the life of Tadelech since her birth. Accordingly, they gave her cloth and other materials as gifts while she was in their home at the time of *gəṭəgəṭə*. The *gəṭəgəṭə* feast started during her baptism, and all the expenses of her baptism were covered by Molalign's parents, by the good will of Ato Wuletaw.

After 8 years feast of *gəṭəgəṭə*, the two families arranged a secret wedding ceremony. Thus, the wedding ceremony was conducted under the name of St. Mikael *ṣābal (daggəs)*. But the exact feature of this *daggəs* was already known by community members, though they never wanted to report it to the locally based legal bodies. After the great hidden wedding feast the two families pledged an agreement under the witness of *agabi shimagilewoch* (marriage negotiators). The major themes of the agreement were about her education, the time of first sexual intercourse and fertility. However, the study found that, her situation about attending a formal education is very unlikely because the issue is not attentively taken by the parents of the spouses and marriage negotiators. The study witnessed the agreement when negotiators came to her family home to decide on her future needs such as her schooling, when she will be able to have sexual intercourse with her husband and when the spouses will start live together on their own *gogḡo*. In spite of the negotiations this study is very skeptical and suspicious especially about whether or not she will be able pursue her education.

In short Tadelech explained the situation on her own words as:

*I got married informally when I was 8. I knew nothing about the situation before my friends called me as yäMolalign məšt (Molalign's wife). I was irritated and asked my father about the naming. He told me that he pledged me to Molalign when I was born and he fears the stigma of qalä bäla (unreliable) and also needs to see my destiny. The feelings which I heard from my parents became real. I did not know anything about marriage but soon I was engaged. I was expected to be a good wife and a household manager (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

#### **4.2.2. Age at First Marriage**

The acceptance of community members in regards to the role of girls in a society determines the marriage age and its arrangement process. Similarly, the socialization process has also its own impact on girls to the acceptance on their marriage. Community members believe and accept that girls should and must marry younger than boys. Thus, a girl should be 10 to 15 years younger than her husband.

The major assumption behind this age gap between the spouses is to form a harmonious life. Unless there is much age gap, a girl is believed to refuse the order of her husband. Nobody needs the age equality between spouses because it challenges the realization of a girl's/woman's acceptance of 'her inferiority' and the order of her husband. Worst of all, if she refused her husband's order she would be forced to divorce and nobody would ask her for marriage and it is difficult to get a husband again. One of the key informants, W/ro Azalech, explained the situation as follows: "It is much easier to get a wife for a 90- year- old man than to get a husband for a 20 year old divorced woman".

One of male key informants, Ato Degu Sisay 89 years old community elder said during interview that the major reason behind the age gap between the spouses is that "girls need less preparation than boys for taking marriage responsibilities and the duty of a girl is home based, unprivileged and uncomplicated". Hence, "boys are trained to perform agricultural activities to become strong, successful farmers and bread winners of house-holds, while girls receive training in domestic activities in preparation to their future married life as housewives and mothers" (Guday, 2005: 109).

In general, Ato Degu Sisay put the situation in his own words as:

*A girl is able to hold and shoulder household responsibilities at her early age, even at the age of 8. Thus, it is not difficult to manage her goğgo after this age. The major difficulty for a boy is to manage the farm activities. Accordingly, the age gap of the spouses is better to compromise the two sex differences on work activities (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Thus, according to the ethnographic data gathered in the course of the study, newly weds are believed to need a relatively wider age gap. Men need to be much older than women for many reasons. They are held in awe due to gender stereotypes. Hence, a woman is supposed to look after and care for her husband not only in his youthhood but also when he gets old. She is also expected to give birth based on his and/or his family's demand, so she should be able to bear children as long as he and her in-laws want her to. It is also believed that being at the same age; the spouses may not respect one another through their marriage life. Additionally, if the spouses were age mates there is a fear that nobody nurses the husband when he gets old. Hence, the wife is both her "husband's children's mother" and protector of the family. And hence, she must young when he is getting old.

### **4.3. The Role of Community Based Organizations in the Hidden Early Marriage Arrangements**

#### **4.3.1. Promoting role of CBOs**

Community based organizations (CBOs) play a significant role in hidden arranged early marriages. Apart from early marriage arranged of parents, these organizations are known for making marriages hidden from legal bodies. This hiding process is done in various forms and mostly in a role of service provision and facilitation of the hidden marriage. Accordingly, since CBOs are community based and organized by, and for the community members, they give a lot of services to them. Thus, the CBOs, like *mahabär*, *şagge*, *sänbäte*, in addition to their role in hiding early marriages from different locally based governmental organizations, such as Women's Affairs Office, Police Officers, Justice Office and Gender Activists, they also give a support (lend) of kitchen and utensils to the hiddenly arranged marriages which is often disguised as *zäkär*, *täzkär*, *dəggəs* and so on. Moreover, they facilitate early marriage in a pretext as an organization working for the community rather than implementing legal minimum age of

marriages. Therefore, this implies that the CBOs allow and facilitate early marriage arrangements in a hidden manner.

On the other hand, religious leaders and God-fathers are also playing a significant role in facilitating the hidden early marriage arrangements, for they bless all sorts of marriages, in whatever age the girls who are supposed to get married at. Thus, they contribute their part in promoting early marriage inside with the early married arranged parents and hiding it from local governmental organizations. Consequently, CBOs in general and religious leaders in particular are blocking the actions and interventions of local based governmental institutions.

### 4.3.2. “Preventive” role of Governmental Institutions

These local governmental institutions include:-

**Fogera Woreda Women’s Affairs Office (FWWAO):** in collaboration with other institutions, the FWWAO works its level best to prevent early marriage arrangements. Among the institutions and individuals working with women’s affairs office to prevent early marriage are school principals, school gender and female students’ advisory committee, Peasant Association leaders and health extension professionals. However, the office still could not play its role to the extent needed. Because all the expected collaborate stakeholders involved in the prevention of early marriage arrangement were related to the community members in one way or another. Furthermore, W/ro Ayichesh Megerssa, deputy head of FWWAO, reflected the problem of preventing the hidden early marriage arrangements in the following way in her own words as:

*Preventing the hidden arrangement of early marriage in our Woreda is a very demanding but it is a difficult task. Hence, every body is deeply involved in the community; no one is willing to provide us (the FWWAO) the accurate information about the hidden early marriage arrangement practice. Sometimes when the office obtains the information, that early marriage took place somewhere in the Woreda, and when we got there, it was found to be disguised in the form of daggas, tazkar, zakar and so on. Thus, the prevention of early marriage a very difficult. Everybody in a community is interlinked each other and hesitates to report the action of his/her relatives.*

In addition, according to W/ro Ayichesh Megerssa, the women’s affairs office has assigned gender activists in all PAs in order to solve the multifaceted hidden arrangement of early

marriage. However, these gender activists keep early marriages hidden instead of exposing the early marriages arranged to the office. And even more surprisingly, these gender activists themselves marry off their own daughters at an early age. Based on the findings of this study, gender activists who are supposed to work against early marriage take part in collaborating with early marriage arranged parents. Gender activists also assist early marriage arranged parents in disguising the situation from the local level governmental institutions.

**Fogera Woreda Justice Office (FWJO):** The FWJO works in collaboration with the *Woreda* police and the *Woreda* courts in preventing early marriage. The office does the prevention by following the support of the police and others. Moreover, based on the information obtained from children (either from the early married girls or their friends), concerned bodies (individuals, polices, teachers, health extension workers) and so on, the office follows the justice procedures done by the courts and works for the execution of justice. Based on the witnesses of Ato Getnet Melese, head of the Fogera *Woreda* Justice Office, the FWJO encountered countless challenges and obstacles in the process of preventing hidden early marriage arrangements. These barriers include:

**Firstly:** The Amhara Regional State has its own codes to prevent early marriage. According to these codes, as well as the verification of Ato Getnet Melese, early marriages must be stopped 15 days before the wedding takes place. However, early marriages take place so hiddenly that information about the arrangement is obtained lately which makes it “illegal” for the office to act to stop early marriage especially, if the information has been obtained within the 15 days to the wedding. The office even works with some violations of the code, to help early married girls, by stopping marriage any time, including the wedding day.

**Secondly:** the ages of the early married girls are not very accurately estimated which may make girls vulnerable to early marriage. This happens during the proceedings of justice in the court room, when the judges request for the confirmation age of the girl from the hospital or health center. However, the health institution itself tries to estimate but not know the accurate age of the girls which leaves the guessing of the age of the girl to the judge. Thus, this kind of failure

on the part of the health institutions and the judges to accurately know the age of the girl sometimes makes the early marriage a legal one.

**Thirdly:** early marriage takes place sometimes when the girl becomes pregnant. After her hidden marriage arrangement took place, and when she became pregnant it is difficult to sue the husband for his imprisonment. Because any legal punishment can no more be a viable decision since the girl will have no other body to support her.

**Fourthly:** the major challenge is the problem that each and every member of the community does not want to expose himself/herself by reporting the hidden arrangement of early marriage by others. As such an action could spell social exclusion for the individual if he/she reports the practice.

Ethnographic data gathered through various techniques revealed that early marriage practice exists in a much hidden pattern, while compared the previous times, as parents and other accomplices try to disguise through various means such as socio-religious ceremonies. This is done to get away from the legal accountability of the "illegal conduct" which is punishable before the court. Hence, family members are well aware of the legal procedure on their practice of hidden early marriage to their daughters; they turn every stone possible to hide everything. Accordingly, each individual in a community collaborates to hide early marriage arrangement from others because community members perceived the hidden arrangement of early marriage as the best option to be taken by the community. Moreover, council of elders and knowledgeable individuals during FGDs explained it on their own words as:

*Early marriage is a visible act for us (community members) and an invisible act for different legal institutions and bodies. Nobody complains and gives information to those legal organizations because he/she is considered as a guilty himself/herself for this action and outcasted from the community. If one complains and reports the hidden arrangement of early marriage, he/she was considered guilty and cursed by the others'. Worst of all, there is no any clue about the hidden marriage arrangement; they (early marriage arranged parents) are very wise. Since, no one wants to interfere with their matter and to be an enemy.*

Comprehensively, the council of elders, religious leaders, PA leaders, CBOs leaders, and other members of the community facilitate the practice instead of preventing it. So, the early marriage situation can be called both visible and invisible for the fact that it is visible from the community's side and invisible from the legal and justice side. The locally based government institutions exert efforts to implement the federal and regional laws in regard to marriage. However, the unwillingness of the community members and CBOs to cooperate with them in the effort to do away with the hidden arrangement of early marriage make the implementation process complicated.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## REASONS FOR EARLY MARRIAGE AND ITS HIDDEN ARRANGMENT PROCEDURES

Though varied literature considered early marriage as a backward, traditional and harmful practice as well as the regional and federal laws forbid it, community members still have valid justifications for the practice. As a result, the local community members arrange early marriage in a hidden manner to escape from legal detections. Parents arrange early marriage by upholding societal order, communal rule and religious values, thus children are getting into marriage at their early age with practical reasons and explanations of their parents. In general, the following discussions focus on the major reasons for early marriage arrangement patterns in Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael Peasant Associations of Fogera *Woreda*, the study area.

### 5.1. Poverty and Economic Burden of the Family Members

In relation to poverty in general and economic burden of the family in particular anonymity of responses were gathered from the ethnographic research methods. However, it is strongly underlined that early marriages were mainly practiced between the well to do families, because they are very keen of securing heir to their wealth and to get a good daughter/son in-law, in addition to the desire to get a labor support for farming activities. Contrarily, the poor families have nothing to give for marriage and to arrange it. On the other hand this argument does not mean that the poor do not want to marry off their children early rather they are rarely asked for marriage by others and do not have enough capital to invest for their children's marriage.


On the other side of the same coin, poverty, in the study area context, is not the only indicator of economic well-being, rather it is an indicator of capital, status, family size, the power and acceptance of the lineage in the community, and the contribution and role of grandparents and parents in the community. Thus, at least for this study, the concept of "poverty" is taken from this point of view. Hence, this study never tried to use other definitions of poverty like the ones that define it as less educational level, backwardness, inability to access modernization and so on. However, the study found some cases in relation to poverty and economic burden as it is a

serious factor contributing to the hidden arrangement of early marriage on the research sites. In this regard, where poverty is acute in the family, a young girl may be regarded as an economic burden and her marriage is believed to be beneficial to her and her family both financially and socially. Her marriage is also perceived as a means of creating stability to the household with the major reason that her parents have decided their daughter's fate or destiny and they also benefit from the bride price. Unfortunately with the exception of scanty of cases on the aforementioned explanation most early marriage arranged parents in Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs, were among the "wealthiest" members of the community. Thus poverty as a cause for early marriage is not supported by the findings of this study.

Thus, the wealth status and resources of parents highly determined the level of material comfort and marriage gifts during and after the marriage arrangement procedure. As a result of these, the well-to-do parents can easily finance and cover all the marriage expenses as well as gifts, like the allocation of resources (cattle) and land. By the same token the findings of Quisumbing & Hallman (2003) witnessed that the groom's family spends three times as much as the bride's family in gifts to the bride's family or to the bride and the groom. It is also strongly believed that men bring substantially more physical and human capital to the marriage than do women (Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 2002, cited in Quisumbing & Hallman, 2003). Consequently, because parents help their sons or daughters through inheritance and other forms of direct economic support, parents' level of material resources influences children's age at marriage. Thus, "wealthy" parents can have a great influence in the marriage arrangement. Moreover, the living arrangement and family formation process of the marrying spouses is the direct result and indicator of their family's background, and therefore, the parents' role in controlling and supervising their children's home stability is very big. As a result, due to many exposures and repeated requests, children of wealthy parents get married in their early ages.

Comparably girls whose family of origin is characterized by high socio-economic status are more likely to marry early than do those from families characterized by low socio-economic status. Moreover, the interest of wealthiest parents to marry off their children with children from well-to-do parents is high. Besides, a great number of families marrying girls at their early age are an

acknowledgement of their higher social status, wealth, prestige and power on their children. On the contrary, girls who marry late are perceived as having poor parents with low social status.

In general, the focus group discussion discussants asserted the issue further as follows: 

*If girls are from a poor family (habtä säbara), nobody wants and asks them for marriage. Their fate is to remain single or to continue their formal education. Moreover, poor families have had nothing to arrange and invest money for marriage feasts. The rich and well to do families and parents, on the other hand, are in need of the perfect heir to their land and other resources as well as they have money and good capital to invest into the marriage feast (FGD with household head parents, Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*If she is from a poor family, she is undesirable, and may wait for a husband until her 20s. This is a shame for her and her family members, because this indicates their living standard and life. However, if she is from the richest family, there are lots of requests for marriage from different angles and her family members will be proud of this. In this regard, poorness or richness is determined by different factors such as social status, wealth, and strength and number of family and siblings'. For instance those who have many family members and friends have had a good social recognition and acceptance and to be considered as a *täkäšša dädana* (rich in many family members or relatives). So, being married or not at an early age is a major indication of status and wellbeing of a girl as well as her family members (FGDs with council of elders and knowledgeable individuals Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Previous studies and national surveys on early marriage arrangements showed that poverty and early marriage are intertwined or the former fuels the latter as well as marriage is carried out at early age of the spouses due to the causes related to poverty. Nevertheless, as this ethnographic data asserted richer people of the community rely on having their young children get married to maintain and preserve their wealth and welfare to the “next generation” in their family.

However, the following hidden early marriage arrangement case is among one of the scanty cases of the study which is found in the research cited due to poverty.

### ***Case 2: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and Family Poverty***

This case happened to an early married girl, Mare, aged 10. She was married under the name of being a housemaid and poverty was the major driving force of the hidden marriage arrangement. It took place due to her mother's interest and the pressure put by the would-be-husband's family members. To accomplish this task, and not to be charged by the law, the marriage was arranged in a way that makes Mare a house maid to her husband's family members. Mare lived with her

mother in a small village in poor living conditions. Her father had left her and divorced the mother, Fenta, when she was four years old. Since they are poor and her mother was unable to fulfill all the basic requirements of life alone, she decided to take up this marriage opportunity and cooperated with her mother in all matters.

When the hidden marriage arrangement happened, the gender activist of the Kuahr Mikael PA, elected by the *Woreda* Women's Affairs Office, gave clue to the justice and police officials. Then both her mother, Fenta, and the suspected husband, Worku were obliged to appear in the court. Both of them pretended that she is a housemaid, but not a wife. Basically, her mother defended as she is a poor divorced woman and unable to fulfill all the needs of her daughter. Then the judge ordered Fenta to preset her daughter, Mare, in the next court proceeding. At that time, Mare admitted to the court that she did not have a father, and her mother was too poor. Thus, she was obliged to sustain her life by becoming a housemaid in Worku's parents' home. Finally, the court let all of them (Mare, her mother and her husband) free.

Based on the issue at hand, Fenta, Mare's mother, elaborated the situation in her own words:

*In this kebele, everything is too surprising and there is unfair situation that we even can not marry off our children. Who orders on the fate of my daughter? Nobody, only me and me! When I decided to marry off my daughter in a hidden manner, as every parent does, the so-called gender activist accused me. I did not have a good relationship with this activist and this is the only reason for my accusation. Thanks to God I was let free in both of the court proceedings (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Furthermore, Fenta argued that she never wants to see the fate of her life in her daughter. As a result, she wants to get a good, respected and faithful son-in-law. For this practical reason, there is no one than herself as a mother to decide on the fate and destiny of her daughter. Additionally, Worku, Mare's husband, and his well-to-do family members are respected by the local people for their generous behavior. Accordingly, Fenta never wanted to miss this chance and let her daughter face a challenge like her. Moreover, she asserted her painful story as:

*My life was so frustrating because of my father's wrong mate selection for me. I got married when I was 16. Now, I am 26. My husband, Destaw, was not a good person. He went to Woreta, on every Saturday, and drank there and got intoxicated. After that he used to beat me and made a physical violence on me. Because of his beating I was divorced two times, fortunately I came back to my parents' home and settled the situation through *yä'aggär šamagällewäč* (council of elders), before and after the birth*

*of Mare. I was unable to continue my life in this manner and I preferred to make a final divorce with him when Mare was 4 years old. So, my life is painful and divorce at an early age is so harsh, that is why, I decided to marry off my daughter to a selected husband from a well-to-do family in a hidden manner (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

On the other hand, Mare decided to get married in order to keep her mother's promise, and her mother was also confident enough that she did not give any information to clear about the marriage. That is why she refused to tell the fact in front of the court. Moreover, Mare voiced the situation in her own words as:

*When I think my mother has sacrificed a lot to raise me up, I get extremely touched. I can not forget what she did for me. So, I am always doing what my mother orders me to do, and she is quite correct in every decision she makes. Initially, I refused my mother that I was not willing to marry in the name of a house-maid, she told me that the person who was going to marry me was from a rich family and I have to be strong to start living with him. After that I decided to collaborate with my mother. Now the life is somewhat good and Worku's parents are eager to see my first birth and to start living with him in our own goḡḡo (hut) in their homestead (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

This case was reported to the court by the gender activist, since there was a rough relationship between Mare's mother, Fenta, and the gender activist. During my field stay in the study area, no other hidden early marriage arrangement was reported to the police or to other PA officials.

## **5.2. The Gender Socialization Process**

Instead of taking their daughters as young or teenage girls, parents are obliged to respect the "community members' custom and way of socialization". They treat them as grownups ready to be wives and mothers. In this context, Bartz and Nye (1970) argued that 'the less socially adjusted a girl is, the more likely early marriage will occur' and, the study found plenty of similar cases. Most early married girls confessed that their parents badly needed and expected their marriage at an early age. Thus, since their infancy, they were not advised by their parents to be eager and interested to anything, including formal education, other than marriage.

Moreover, the parental nurturing and socializing process of their children to be eager for early marriage is totally confined with the two explanations and propositions of Bartz and Nye (1970) that, the more satisfaction a girl anticipates from marriage, the more likely early marriage will occur and the more optimistic a girl's expectations and attitudes towards marriage, the more

likely early marriage will occur. In general, the following ethnographic results affirmed the situation further as:

*Since childhood, my father and my mother always talked and advised me about the benefits of marriage. They are always proud of themselves to be grandparents, because of my great elder brother. Nobody has ever been sent to school in our family. They were keen about arranging a marriage. Thus, I dream and thought that getting married at an early age and rearing children was a wonderful moment in my life (In-depth interview with an early married girl, Minalush Kassa aged 13, Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*My parents were married at their early age, my mother was 13 and my father was 21. They married forty years ago. My parents never had a single conflict in their marriage life. It is interesting for me to hear the success stories of my parents' marriage life and I wish I could have a marriage life like them. They also advised and told me about the marriage benefits and the dignity and prestige which one can get from it. They never wish to be ashamed by me, nobody was allowed to say and gossip on my behavior. Thus, I was interested to have my own goğgo and give birth to children, and live a wonderful life with my husband, like my parents. That is why I never dared to challenge my parents during my hidden and "secret" marriage (In-depth interview with an early married girl, Tenaye Melak aged 14, Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*My father is a priest and a respected individual in the community. All of his children are in best social positions and nobody speaks rumors about our behavior. I started formal school when I was 8, before 10 years, but due to my marriage I was not able to continue. I stopped my formal education when I got married at the age of 11, when I was in grade 3. Mostly my mother was eager to marry me and she was also in a great need of my first birth. In addition, she wanted to return what she contributed to others' marriage feasts by arranging my marriage and inviting the community members. Now, I am 18 years old with two children (In-depth interview with an early married girl, Feleku Bitew aged 18, Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*My mother and my father got divorced when I was 4. Since then the whole responsibility of my life was put to my mother. Accordingly, she never wants me to be a woman like her in the future. Thus, she is very enthusiastic to get a good husband to me. She was always advising and giving me basic points about her life and how would I become a strongest girl. Thus, her dream is to marry me to a good husband and see my destiny (In-depth interview with an early married girl, Mare Destaw aged 10, Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

In a brief explanation, girls were married at their early age because they want to leave their parental home and they believe that marriage is the best solution for relieving themselves and their parents from social burdens. Additionally, the home is important, as it is the major setting for the socialization of children, where many of the transfers of the resources needed by the next generation are made.

In line with the above issue, one of the key informants, Enatihun Abera aged 54, from Zeng Mikael PA acknowledged the responsibility and duty of parents to their children, in her own words as:

*I feel so responsible about my children's fate, what will happen in their lives. Thus, early arranged marriages give happiness to both of us (parents) and to our children. As long as the parents of the children are happy it does not matter, children would always adapt through time. Marriage interaction and understanding between the partners is not a one day activity, rather it needs time to make and consider the two partners as one. Moreover, we (parents) are able to consider and understand our children's deepest feelings in one hand and with what kind of person they could live in the other hand. Thus, we never take undignified action primarily to our children, and secondarily to our kinship line, glory and fame in our community (Zeng Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Since parents are concerned with their children's long term well-being and a good partner relationship, it is a grave issue and decisive fact that is acknowledged by them seriously. Therefore, conflict could arise between children and their parents in marriage partner selection for children. Nevertheless, the gender socialization, which teaches girls and/women to be obedient and submissive nurturing paved the way for ordering their daughters easily.

According to the ethnographic data of this study, girls are raised being submissive and taught household duties, to be good wives that their mothers benefited a great deal from their marriage. They become tantalized by only the positive outcomes of early marriage. They grow-up in a parental nurturing and shaping environment that even the early married girls are encouraged by their parents that they have had a good life after early marriage. As a result, young girls are fully convinced of their early marriage as an exact trend and practice. Even if they do not accept it or in a trial of hesitation, they are put under pressure that they must conform to the social norms, which they can never alter in any way.

### **5.3. Parents' Lack of Hope in Formal Education**

Before reaching to the "womanhood" status and giving births, a girl is regarded as immature and her training must be confined to her household with her husband and her in-laws. Once a girl is out from her parents home and resides with her husband and in-laws' household, she is no more the concern of her parents. Thus, the major role and duty of parents would be to teach and train household responsibilities not to be ashamed by her when she gets married. Moreover, she learns submissive behavior towards her husband and in-laws.

Most of the parents and family members could not go to school and attend “formal education”, and even they did not want to send their children to attend school. They argued that allowing their children to attend school means letting them meet people who might drive them from their cultures. Here, twofold major reasons are found in this study regarding formal education:

Firstly, most of the community members do not want to send their children to the local formal school. Thus, their lack of interest in the “formal school” system forces them to marry off their children at an early age. The children of such parents are also socialized in line with the interest of their parents and these children never ask to go to school and attend a “formal” education. Moreover, parents have had a great concern that their children will be treated ‘unfairly’ and ‘baselessly’, if they attend a “formal school”.

Secondly, most of the community members have had their own basic questions on the merits of “formal education”. In this regard, the only role models in the community, who are successful in schooling, are Health Extension Workers, Developmental Agriculturalists and PA leaders. Thus, it is difficult for parents to let their children to school and see them lead a ‘miserable life’ like the aforesaid government servants. Worst of all, the income and living condition of the government civil servants in the research sites is not well suited compared to the “uneducated” farmers.

Furthermore, there is a direct and interrelated assumption about family size and formal education, i.e., the more a girl attends a “formal education”, the less she gets married at an early age and has many children. As a result, if the family size gets smaller, it makes the continuity of their kinship line very risky and questionable.

In this regard, the case about Ato Alebel Tasew, one of the key informants, hereunder presents the major indicator of the local people’s perception and individuals’ attitude towards “formal” education. Accordingly, Ato Alebel Tasew was born into a highly respected and honored family in the community. His father and mother were from a respected family. Though he did not continue and had stopped it, he was one of the family members who went to the religious school, rather than to the “formal school”. His parents were keen that their respected kinship line should be maintained all the time. They encouraged their children to marry at an early age and give as

many births as possible. As the eldest son of the family, Alebel enjoyed respect and took a guardianship role in the life of the family. He was among the few in the community who were able to have an influential and respected character. Thus, for Alebel the formal education system adds nothing to his life, on his prestige in the community and economic well-being. He says “he didn’t take full advantage of attending a formal school” and he does not want to send his children to school too. Thus, he arranged an early marriage for three of his children and never wanted to advise them to think about “formal education”. Accordingly, all of his children were either promised to marriage or have had established their own *goğgo* and gave births.

In line with the above issue, one of Alebel’s daughter, Banchi, aged 5 year and 6 months, and was already engaged, said that she had never wanted to go to school and attend a formal learning, rather she wants to be a rich farmer, like her father, by forming her own *goğgo*. She further said:

*I do not want to go to school. I hate the formal schooling because it is boring and nasty. My father advised me not to go to school. I want to be a rich farmer by forming my own goğgo (hut). My mother also advised me not to go to school. My mother said that she missed me when I started a formal school, because I was obliged to go to a far place. Thus, I do not want to miss my parents (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Similarly, an early married girl, Minalush Kassa aged 14, from Zeng Mikael PA during an in-depth interview, witnessed the situation as:

*My parents were keen to marry me at an early age and they told me that there is no life other than this. As a result, when I got myself option less, I preferred and agreed to marry at an early age, at 14. I do not have any opposition, because my parents never let me go to school and I was engaged in household duties. Moreover, I had doubts about formal education that I do not need any money generated by formal education for two reasons: One, it is very difficult and tiresome to attend formal school. Two, I do have wealthy parents and they never let me down. Additionally, as my parents always advised me, there is no a good role model in our PA who leads a good life through education (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

There was also uncertainty that if children started a “formal education”, they would be in a position to depart from the good will of their parents and would be able to convince either to postpone their marriage or refuse to get married at an early age. Thus, allowing them to attend school means letting them to be out of their parents’ control and decision. One of the key informants clarified the situation in a proverb that *əğgän bääğg mäqurät nəw* (cutting the hand by myself). Most educated women in the study area also delayed their marriage and this is considered by the community members as due to the lack of opportunity to be asked by the

would-be husbands. As a result, if girls were highly educated or more educated than their husbands, the marriage might not be successful, if it succeeds, it will not continue for a long. On the other hand, even if the family has sacrificed to send children to further education at an institute or a college, they will most likely remain unemployed, hesitate to come back to their homeland and stay behind the small towns as a “boga-bond”. Moreover, parents of school attending children feared that their children may be exposed to the temptation of premarital sex and unwanted pregnancy, so they force them to drop out of school and get married. Hence, education has had the undoubted effect of delaying the girls’ age at marriage and their departure from parental control; parents did not want to send their daughters to another PAs and small towns for “formal” schooling.

On the other hand, because of varied reasons, those girls who attended schooling at local schools did not go further. One of the reasons is that parents did not see education as the ultimate destiny of their children and have a lack of interest in letting them go to school. The UNICEF (2001: 11) digest argued on the issue as “while there has been a recent drive to increase participation of girls in basic education, the more significant gender gap is at the secondary level”.

Similarly, one of the key informants, Fetfite Birega aged 68, from Zeng Mikael PA during an in-depth interview uttered the situation in her own words as:

*I have four children; I am not much interested in letting them attend a formal school. I do not advise them about formal education. They will benefit nothing from it. I tried a long ago to send my elder son to school, unfortunately he was not happy as well as the harvesting process became too weak. Since then I decided that my children should be strong farmers. Nowadays, thanks to God, we (the family) are able to produce three times a year. Thus, I am lucky to stop my children from going to school, the life of mine and my children is better than the others who send their children to school, even it is much more than those who finished schooling and have their own job (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Consequently, the following arranged early marriage of Alemnesh took place in a hidden manner due to her parents’ lack of hope in “formal education”.

### ***Case 3: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and Parents' Lack of Hope in Formal Education***

The case study hereunder is about Alemnesh, aged 13, who lives in Kuahr PA. Her marriage took place during the *qəbāla* period. Her father, Ato Zeweld is one of the courageous and respected individuals in the village. There was frequent and strong pressure from the villagers to marry off his daughter, Alemnesh. He also fears that his daughter could lead the life of governmental workers in the community, which is a non-comfortable life to him, since he is relatively wealthy and well-to-do. He never would let his daughter to school to lead a “poor and miserable” life. Thus, lack of hope in formal education served as a major reason for Alemnesh’s hidden early marriage arrangements. Additionally, being popular and respected in the community helped Ato Zeweld a lot to arrange the marriage in a hidden manner. Nobody reported this case to the police, to the court or to other PA officials.

Ato Zeweld further gave details on the issue at hand in his own words as:

*I have the mandate to decide on my child's fate. No one can say anything and has nothing to do with the life of my daughter. Educating my daughter means letting her lead her life in a miserable manner, shortly to see my daughter in a life of *käəgğ wädä afä* (hand to mouth). Thus, my child brings nothing new in her life through formal education. I do not want to see my child to lead a bad life like those community health workers, developmental agriculturalists and PA leaders, by educating her. Thanks to God, I am a wealthy person, so she never wants more than that, I would rather eagerly look forward to marrying my daughter and her giving birth before I get old (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Initially, Alemnesh was promised to marriage, a promissory marriage, with her husband’s families when she was born. At that time, Ato Zeweld promised her and started the *gəgəgə* feast with his son-in-law’s family since her *krəstənnä* (baptism). Thus, the case of Alemnesh is clearly in line with the finding of SCD, MoE & MoWA (2008: 20) that “girls are promised for marriage in infancy, at 4-5 years, and, even in uterus”. On the other hand, Alemnesh’s mother, Alamne, is also confident and equally powerful in deciding familial matters, and accepted the proposal of Alemnesh’s marriage. For Alamne, it is a good chance to show her ability in making *təla* (local beer) and holding a great feast. Thus, both of the parents decided and all the wedding feasts were prepared. Then the marriage took place by lying to the villagers as if it was just to remember Ato Zewelde’s deceased father (Ato Worke), i.e., to hold a *təzkär* ceremony for his deceased father.

Alemnesh further acknowledged the situation in her own words as:

*Now, I am 13 years old girl and never went to and attended formal school. My father has no interest in "formal" education. He did not ever tell me about the benefits of education once, rather he has been keenly interested to see me when I give birth. My in-laws, on the other hand, were in a good familial relationship with my parents, particularly with my father. I never and ever dreamed that Molla, aged 23, would be my husband. He treated me as his sister in the time of familial interactions. But my father was telling me about the good aspects of my in-law, especially Molla. On the other hand, Molla's father, Ato Melese, never called me by my name, rather he nicknamed me as 'Deresech' (she is mature enough to marry). Accordingly, one day, I understood and knew everything about the meaning behind 'Deresech' when my father told me about what would happen. I was so upset when I knew that I am going to depart from my parents. I told the situation to my mother, but she was also comfortable and very keen about my marriage, and she told me about the merits of marriage and her eagerness to be a grandmother. Moreover, she was enthusiastic to make a great feast. Thus, the marriage was arranged in a hidden manner, under the umbrella of my beloved deceased grandfather, Worke's täzkär, and both families were very happy about their being able to keep their promise (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Similarly, this study found the two basic propositions of Bartz and Nye (1970) as main factors for the practice of early marriage, i.e., the less interest or ability a boy or girl has in pursuing formal education, the more likely early marriage will occur and the lower the educational level of a girl's parents, the more likely early marriage will occur. Here, it is worth mentioning that the concept "education" should be understood, in this study, in its "formal" form. Thus, the aforementioned explanation of education does not include the religious education.

#### **5.4. Parents' Desire to Confirm the Continuity of the Family Line**

The importance of marriage and marital status is a great and interlinked factor in influencing the size and structure of the household and family members. At this point, there was a twofold fear on the side of the parents, i.e., on the continuity of their lineage and the giving birth of their children. Hence, parents were in a very wholehearted position and strong feeling that they should have to arrange the marriage of their children before they passed away.

Plenty of cases in the study revealed about parental eagerness for their kinship continuity and further affirmed by the argument of Fricke and Teachman (1993) as "the interval between marriage and first birth is especially important in pre-transition populations". Where childbearing contributes significantly to a woman's social identity, a first birth proves her fertility and reduces

the anxiety surrounding family continuance. Where children are a prelude to household fission in a rural society, a first birth begins a new phase in the cycle of family and household formation. Where marriage reproduces labor and other exchanges between families, a first birth lays the groundwork for future plans in recreating old and forming new alliances. Moreover, marriage binds the generations in the shared beliefs that what has been true and lasting in the past is true and lasting today and will remain so safely across time (DelCampo & DelCampo, 1999). Thus, marriage is the occasion for a substantial transfer of assets from the parent to the child generation and it is a rite of passage that marks the beginning of an individual's separation from the parental unit, even if generations continue to be socially and economically interdependent (Quisumbing & Hallman, 2003).

Indeed, the way parents' desire to have large family size put pressure on their daughters to give birth at early age. Moreover, both her and her husband's parents were attentively calculating the different benefits that could be obtained from the large family size. Thus, young girls are forced to enter into marriage and expected to give birth to as many children as possible.

Consequently, the ethnographic study proved that children who gave many births are getting a lot of blessing from their family for continuing the family line with many family members. Beside that, parents aspire to have their children bear them grandchildren which are considered as a great pride to the family. As a result, for most parents, the desire to have many grand-children is considered as a primary reason to make decisions favoring early marriage.

The following case of Alemitu Zewdu explains parents' desires to get grand children from her as the major reason for her being married at an early age in a hidden manner.

#### ***Case 4: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and Parents' Desire to be Grand-parents***

In some cases, early marriage arranged parents were known or identified by the PA leaders or concerned bodies when their children stopped to attend their formal schooling. Thus, in order to break away from such identification, the bride's family members pledged an agreement with the groom's family about the continuity of her education. But, most of the young girls who married at their early age never come to school again due to the burden of household duties.

Initially, Alemitu's parents had promised to give her in a marriage in order to affirm the relationship between them and her in-laws when she was 7 years old. Accordingly, the gəṭəgəṭə feast between the marrying families has gone for seven solid years. When she reached 14, all the family members believed that she could be able to uphold household responsibilities and to give birth, and she was married in a hidden manner. Moreover, her parents sent her to formal schooling (education) after many hesitations, because their aim was not to educate her, but rather to marry her early and to see the continuity of their kinship line.

Consequently, her marriage was arranged before three years under the umbrella of Mikael daggəs, at the month of Tir 12 (January). Then her father and her husband's father pledged an 'informal' or verbal agreement about the schooling of Alemitu, but neither her husband nor her husband's family want to send her to formal school. Thus, she was frustrated and asked her father about the issue, but her father hesitated to ask the parents of his son-in law and the issue was pending. In the mean time, the school principal got the information and forced Alemitu's husband to send her to school. After discussing the issue with him, her husband allowed her to continue her education. Unfortunately, after six months of absenteeism from school, she became pregnant and was unable to continue her formal schooling.

Alemitu further elaborated the situation in her own words as:

*I was married to a 28 years old boy when I was 14. At that time, I was a grade 3 student and was unaware of marriage. I cried at that time, but nobody wanted sharing my pain. Everybody said you are matured enough to handle the household duties and give birth too. The marriage was arranged under the emblem of Tir Mikael daggəs. After 15 days of my hidden marriage arrangement, I was forced to go to my husband's home and they told me all the merits which I had to get there including the continuity of my schooling. But, I suffered from lots of hardships. I had household duties such as carrying water in a clay-pot every morning, making the dung's of animals for further uses. Those were the times when I wanted to continue my education, play with my friends, want to eat and dress perfectly. I was afraid of asking both my in-laws and my husband to continue my formal schooling. Unfortunately, they were not on their promise about my education and my grievance became so high. I never got the chance to discuss with them about my likes and dislikes. I never even get access to my family and friends. After many interventions, I was allowed to start my education. Worst of all, I became pregnant and unable to attend my formal education. Now, I have a 1 year old daughter and my hidden marriage became public. After this, there is no more accusing and asking on my early marriage because I already obliged to start another life (Zeng Mikael PA, January 2010).*

The above case depicts that the hidden arranged early marriage becomes 'formal' and public because of Alemitu's giving birth. Thus, the concerned bodies, mainly the local justice officials, approved the hidden early marriage after birth. One of my key informants, from the justice office in the study area, witnessed that the law does not force early married spouses to be divorced after birth because the new born child will lose his protectors.

Similarly the following case of Feleku is an additional indicator of parents' desire to continue their family line through their grand-children.

### ***Case 5: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and Parents' Desire to Continue their Family Line***

The early marriage arrangement of Feleku took place five years ago, when she was 14. She gave birth to three children after her hidden marriage under the umbrella of *täzkär*. In the name of *täzkär*, many people including the PA officials were invited. She was surprised by the government officials' reluctance to report her marriage. Feleku voiced her early marriage life in her own words as "I was forced to marry at the age of 14. Since my father is a rich man I had lots of household and farming activities, I never attended formal education. My marriage was arranged in the name of *täzkär*. My father always talks to celebrate the *täzkär* of his deceased mother as a cover to my marriage. Moreover, my father and other family members warned me that I would become undesirable if I did not get married and accept this chance.

Hence, I was given to my father's best friend's son, Girum, aged 26 and never attended a formal school, and forced me to live with him. I was not able to say anything about the actions taken over me. I think this is not the exact time to say something about my fate, because I already missed many chances to uphold my personal rights. I, even, never asked them to send me to school to attend formal education.

I got pregnant after 6 months of my hidden marriage. At this time, every body accepts it as 'normal' and my hidden marriage became real and "legal". When my rumor based life and household situation came into public, Girum and his family members became happy since they escaped from frustration. Many congratulations go to Girum because of my misfortune, for

realizing the continuity of his kinship and genealogical line. So, I decided to go back to my mother's home to give a birth. After two weeks stay in my moms home, I gave my first birth with the support of my mother and the traditional midwife of the goṭ (perish). My child becomes my wealth and everything. I turn out to accept all the misfortunes for the sake of my child. I am nothing without my child (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).

Thus, after children are born the chance of separation is so limited and the marriage is sustained through children. Accordingly, girls/women are always carrying forward every relationship, after giving birth, with their husbands and suffer for the sake of their children, their family and for their respect too.

### **5.5. To Give a Male Guardianship for their Daughters**

Parents in the community believe that their daughters' life is sustained and continued by the protection of male guardian. Thus, in order to 'survive', it is strongly argued that girls should have their own fathers, brothers or husbands, unless they are regarded as "unfit". This study also found that a girl or a woman is respected by her husband in the first place and by her children in the second instance. For instance, she was metamorphically called as a 'mother of her children' rather than by her name. In spite of this fact, family members need to get a guard to their daughters by marrying them off early. Thus, often they are forced and obliged to leave their parents' home. During their marriage, girls were finding and got a life long marriage partner with whom they are able to share their miseries and difficulties of life.

In line with the aforementioned issue, Sweetman (2003:5) argued that women expected to have respect, status and resources in a community. Accordingly, the expected resources are classified into two: tangible and intangible resources. Thus, shelter, food, and other daily necessities, a degree of protection, at least from violence at home, are considered in the former category. Whereas, respect and status in the family and community are in the later category. As a result, for many women, in many contexts, these vital resources cannot be easily found outside marriage. Consequently, marriage transforms women from 'nobodies' to 'homebodies'. Thus, the social identity they acquire is based on their attachment to their husbands (ibid). In the study area, community members also believe that girls/women are dependent on men and they are unable to

defend themselves. A woman is believed to be in need of a male guardianship for she can not protect herself and her needs on her own. So, community members in general and early marriage arranged parents in particular believe that the young girl's 'weakness' can be backed-up through her marriage partner.

In this regards, married girls start working and living together with their husbands in their own *goğğo*, and sustain themselves by generating their own income. It is a good time to start and continue making decisions by themselves. Thus, they can shoulder responsibilities and manage their affairs independently. In addition to some teenagers, like those who faced problems and violence at their home, for those who live with their step-parents in a non-comfortable family environment, marrying at an early age and leading their own life is a best opportunity to break-away from this uncomfortable situation.

Moreover, a girl starts the life of womanhood, through early marriage, and is able to venture herself in the future of her fate and can have a full control over her future life. Early marriage is, therefore, not simply a financial arrangement between the marrying spouses, rather it is a potential means to make people better-off depending on their duty and activities. Consequently, the partners must work hard constantly and vigorously to cooperate, and apply their income and efforts to a common venture. These are important forewarnings of the partners by themselves.

Hence, marriage in general and early marriage in particular is a major means of wealth accumulation and generating income. Early married partners are, therefore, earn more income in terms of cattle, land, agricultural products and they can save money and be in a better condition as well as in a respected and good position in their future life than their unmarried counterparts, in their community. As a result, marriage helps people to generate income and wealth as compared to the unmarried ones. Thus, people who married early become economically better off. Married men become more productive after marriage while compared with single men with similar education and job histories. Moreover, marital social norms encourage healthy, productive and wealth accumulation behavior to the spouses. Some of the greater wealth of married couples results from their more efficient specialization and pooling of resources, and because they save more. In spite of the marriage, according to Hoben (1973), it is hoped that the

livestock of the marrying spouses will multiply, children will be born and the household will obtain control over an increasing amount of land.

Indeed, younger partners have the chance to learn and make cooperation for their lives together. They have the opportunity to learn their responsibilities and household duties, privately. Not only does it help to learn these rudiments in their early years of life, but also leaves much time to make mistakes and to fix them. At the other end, based on the ethnographic data, religious leaders, grandparents and parents articulated that their thoughts may differ about the assumption of early marriage, particularly from the "legal age of marriage". Accordingly, it is strongly acknowledged that the couple who have been married since a young age, have grown, specially a girl, to think similarly and thus they do not have opinions that vary quite as much. Thus, they have to be wealthy and respected at their long lasting life plus to that divorce and sex outside marriage is unthinkable which is duly respected in such marriage arrangements.

Thus, the arrangement of marriage at an early age is a major means and a way of ensuring that a wife is sheltered and placed firmly under her husband's control and she becomes the bearer of children as well as a legitimate descendant of her and her husband's parents' kinship line. Thus, the long term relationship of the marrying family members came into real bond through children. As a result, the children a girl bears are the legitimate offsprings of the marrying spouses and the bonds of affection between couples can be regarded as the bond of the spouses' family members too. Consequently, the role of marrying young children is not limited to their own *goğgo*, rather they have also a significant role in the communal life. As a result, everybody is taking care of the marriage arrangement processes.

### ***Case 6: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangements and Parents' Desire to Form Marriage Alliance with a Respected Family***

I met many people with impressive and educative stories, but the person whom I met in Zeng Mikael, teacher Fiker Belete, sticks in my mind. However, the story is not about him, rather it is about his sister, Sinafiksh.

My key informant, teacher Fiker, boldly asserted the situation of his sister, Sinafiksh, in his own words as "I was born and raised in this village (Zeng Mikael). My mother has six children including me. I am the first child in the family, and my mother started to give birth while she was 15 with no delivery problem at the time. Fortunately, my uncle took me to Aember town, and hence I was lucky to be able to attend my formal education. But the rest of my siblings did not get any opportunity to attend formal education at all, and all got married and gave births.

My mother feels as she lives with no problem and looks her marriage at an early age as good, and hence she accepted any marriage proposal of my siblings which came through our father. It is due to two sided influences that I lost my beloved sister, Sinafiksh. When Sinafiksh was a 5 and half-year-old child, my father promised her to a marriage alliance locally known as '*ləğəhn läləğä*'. His main reasons for the marriage alliance were the family of the proposed husband of Sinafiksh who were highly respected, religious and behaviorally appreciated by the local people. My father had a good, old relationship with *kess* (priest) Membere, the father of Sinafiksh's husband (Alamrew), and it is to strengthen this relationship that Sinafiksh was given to Alamrew.

Then the wedding ceremony preparation for Sinafiksh started. She was not informed about what was going on, except the mention of Alamrew's, her would-be husband's, goodness and kindness. Next, when Sinafiksh was 10 years old, the hidden marriage took place in the name of celebrating St. Mikael's day. Though Sinafiksh was crying when she knew that she was going to marry, the response given to her was a local saying '*wäg näwə sidaru maləqäs*' (it is a tradition/custom to cry at marriage). After the hidden arranged marriage, and rumors get cooled, Sinafiksh was ordered by our parents to go to Alemante's family, and she did so by accepting the order.

After she lived together with her husband for two years, I (Fiker) got a message that Sinafiksh was very sick. When I reached there and I saw her, she had lost her childhood's beauty and I even got confused whether she was my sister. I started crying and took her to Aember health center. The nurses saw her and told me to take her to Debre Tabor, or Woreta health center for further treatment. While taking her to Debre Tabor hospital, I saw that she could not control her urine. I was frustrated and preferred my death. Then the doctors in Debre Tabor hospital saw her and they told us that the problem happened to her might be a 'fistula' and told us to take her to Bahir Dar Hamlin fistula center.

The Bahir Dar Hamlin fistula center gave her treatment and we were told that she could get treatment at Woreta fistula center at any time when she feels further pain. She was also told not to have any sexual intercourse. After we stayed four weeks at Bahir Dar Hamlin fistula center, we took her to our village. Then I took her back to our family home for better care, and I returned to my work place by informing my parents' to call me if she had any strange feeling. After two months of stay, the villagers insisted that it was not good to separate her from a respected husband and she went back to her husband.

After much hesitation, my father let her go to her husband by warning her and her husband not to have sex. Her husband kept his promise for months; only to break it after a while. As a result, she became pregnant. When I heard this misfortune I told them that she would have to go to hospital to check her health status. But priest Menberu (her father in-law) refused the idea and said that St. Mikael would protect her from anything evil. I got myself powerless to do anything and I came back home. After four months of her pregnancy, her womb could not carry the fetus and resulted in excessive bleedings. We took her to Aember town, where the health center workers saw her and wrote a referral letter to Bahir Dar hospital. Unfortunately, on the way to Bair Dar, just some kilometers left to Woreta town, Sinafiksh took her last breath at the age of 14".

According to the above case, after pledging Sinafiksh for marriage, her parents, her in-laws and community members push her to go to Alamrew's parent's home by persuading her to start living with him as soon as possible. After Sinafiksh was gone to her in-laws homestead, her in-laws put her under pressure to live with Alamrew in their own *goggo*. She was also told to start giving

birth. On the other hand the two marrying families feel quite proud of the fact that they were able to keep their word; and consider all Sinafiksh's trauma as fully caused and meant by God.

On the other hand, one of the community members Ato Dessalegn arranged a hidden early marriage for both of his daughters at the same time and the following case illustrates parents' desire to get a male guardian to their daughters as the motive behind the hidden arrangement of early marriage in the research sites.

### ***Case 7: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangements and Parents' Desire to Have a Male Guardian***

Ato Dessalegn Meshesha, a 40-year-old man, was born in Zeng Mikael PA where he lives. He has four children. The first two are daughters, 14 and 12, and the others are sons, 10½ and 8. Ato Dessalegn was eager to see his children get married. A year ago, on a trip to Bahir Dar, a car accident happened to him, and he was severely injured. Even after recovery, he was so frustrated by the accident since he was so worried about his death before he saw his children's destiny. This is a turning point to arrange his daughters' (Etagegn and Ajebush) marriage in a hidden manner.

Thus, in order to minimize the costs of wedding feasts on the one hand and to see his children's destiny on the other hand, Ato Dessalegn arranged a marriage for both of his daughters at the same time. On the issue at hand, most grandparents, parents, community elders and knowledgeable individuals, during focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews, articulated that parents who are either poor or with many children often arranged the marriage of their daughters collectively in order to reduce the marriage costs. Thus, Ato Dessalegn's case is basically related with the latter's consideration. Accordingly, Ato Dessalegn's daughters, Etagegn and Ajebush, were forced to marry at the age of 14 and 12, just by pretending that the feasts are to celebrate the day that their father was saved from death during the car accident a year ago. The two early married girls, Etagegn and Ajebush, were 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students, respectively. The marriage was arranged by the agreement with the parents-in-law to continue the brides' education in their husbands' village.

During the hidden wedding feast, the villagers were quite informed about the wedding ceremony. Unfortunately, the *Woreda* officials, principals, agricultural development workers and other officials had been supervising the PA, and they were invited at the feast, but no one guessed and knew what was taking place. The researcher was surprised and asked one of the villagers about the events and he told to him (the researcher) that it was not a strange thing to cheat the officials in this manner. According to the informant, in one instance, the police and justice officials were also cheated by one of the early marriage arranged by parents as if the feast were *zākər*.

After 21 days of their hidden marriage, the two brides were obliged to go to their respective husbands' home. The researcher has keenly observed the case and got informed that there is no any formal school in both marrying families' villages. They even did not come back to their previous school till the researcher was in the fieldwork. Of course, it is a common trend in the community that husbands and their parents agree to send the brides to school at the initial stage and forget their obligation after the marriage was arranged. Moreover, most of the early married girls got pregnant after their marriage and things became worse to them though pleasant for the groom families. Thus, the hidden interests of the husbands' families to see the continuity of their family line came to real when their daughter-in-laws got pregnant.

Thus when parents have life threatening encounters such as fatal accidents they wake up with the awareness that they need to do something about their daughters. It is obvious that every parent want their children to do well in life, but such parents, like Ato Dessalegn, demanded marriage of their daughters in order to see them before they bare passed away.

By the same token, one of the key informants, W/ro Tirumar, revealed the hidden arranged early marriage as:

*Most of the marrying parents grant commitments like when the spouses should live together in their own goḡḡo, start sexual intercourse, give birth and also about the bride's education. But, it is difficult to meet one of the agreements which are impractical. Most negotiations are just ways of making the daughters feel easy about their marriage goings-on. The daughters have any chance to make decisions. Everything is carried out by parents and negotiators from the groom's family. In most cases daughters are persuaded by their parents as obtaining great benefit through the marriage. Hence, they accept all troubles without any hesitation (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

## 5.6. Fear of Social Stigma and Loss of Social Status

Parents and community elders revealed that marrying off daughters at an early age is a key to get social recognition and escape from social stigma. This study also witnessed that social pressures to conform to societal norms are major causes for the persistence of early marriage. Thus, these norms are clearly accepted and agreed upon by community members and externalized by many instances, like in early marriage arrangements. Moreover, parents arranged early marriage in a hidden manner and the rest of community members' collaborated with them to preserve the socially accepted norms. Accordingly, the parents of the spouses did not have any power to deviate from this guideline and it would be very difficult to go against the social norms and delay their children's marriage. Thus, deviation from societal norms and pressures may lead parents to loss social status and consider themselves as they are powerless in making decision on their children's life chances. Generally speaking, the power, reputation, prestige and honor of the family are measured by the amount of influence/control parents exert on their children.

Such social pressures include, among others, strains from community members to the girl's parents, like, why they were not getting their daughter married yet and suggesting objectionable comments and fears about the fate and future life of the girl by giving a marriage proposal to their daughter. In general, during the focus group discussions held with grandparents, parents and knowledgeable individuals, girls should get married, at their early age in order to maintain the status and social prestige of their families. Thus, a girl has married, engaged or promised to marriage before any societal pressure and many finger pointing towards her and her family.

In this context, the ethnographic research participants noted the following points:

*If parents do not get their daughters married at the proper age or promised them for marriage, the community members and the relatives of the family will talk about the girl in particular and the parents in general. People ask why not her parents get her married. They derogatively say: her own parents wish to marry her themselves, or they are waiting till she produces a horn (in Amharic, *arasačw liyagäbuwät näw ände; qānda askatabäqəl näw ände ymiṭbbäquwät*). Thus, family members do not want to get in such social exposures. As a result, they think that their daughters should get married before anyone points his/her finger on her and them too (FGDs with grand parents, parents, community elders and knowledgeable individuals in Kuahr and Zeng Mikael PAs, January -February 2010).*

*Our parents are worried about their dignity and reputation. They think that if we did not get married by their good will, they considered us as we did undesirable things and paved a way to social stigma. After that nobody asks us for marriage, we are already in the stigmatic range and position in our community. Once we lost our status and reputation nobody will marry us. This is the great concern of our parents (FGD's with early married girls, Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

*Most parents considered early marriage as an acceptable social norm and tradition. They know that marrying their daughter at an early age is an illegal act and that is why they arranged it in a hidden way. This is a social custom and nobody wants to violate it, if anyone tries to violate this custom or reported the hidden practice to the legal bodies, he/she will be spurned or rejected by the community members (Ato Asmamaw Gobeze, a Key Informant, Zeng Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Since deviating from socially accepted norms may make parents to be considered as they were powerless on controlling their children's behavior, community members are very sensitive to their reputation and do not want to deviate from the approved norms of the society. The religious leader in Zeng Mikael exemplified the issue at hand by using a local expression as, mainly in relation to reputation, *səm kasām yibəltalə* (dignity smells more than wax). Moreover, the failure in those marriage promising parents, of their children's marriage, put them in a great danger of social exclusion and made them regarded as unfaithful (*matäbä bis*). Accordingly, parents promise each other to marry their children and then arranged the marriage. Hence, the aforementioned arguments were an indication of social relationships, fears as well as promises and argued with the proposition of Bartz and Nye (1970) that 'the earlier a girl becomes engaged the more likely early marriage will occur', however, the engagement is held on by parents.

Similarly, one of the early married girls, Ajobush Dessalegn, aged 12, asserted that the social norm as well as the good position of her father in the society paved the way for her marriage. She further acknowledged that she has not any power to deviate from such a tradition and regrets about the practice. In short, she stated the situation on her own words as:

*... My father is a respected person in the community. Because of his social and economic position, everybody in our community obliged him to marry me off at an early age. Thus, they told him that I will be a qomo qär (unmarriageable), if he did not arrange an early marriage for me. As a result, my father was forced to marry me at an early age (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

In the community where this ethnographic study was conducted, parents believe that they would be given high social respect when they have children who got married. It is obvious that such people give priority to their pride and social prestige as in what others think of them than what their teenage daughters go through in an early marriage.

In general, due to the socially accepted norms and values, nobody is allowed to deviate from them and the social power and status of a respected person is to be acknowledged by the community members. Thus, everybody is obliged to conform to the social norm. There is also a widely held belief that the longer a girl stays without getting married, the greater shame and the higher risk for her in having casual sexual relationships. Furthermore, since sex before and outside a marriage is still a taboo, where pregnancy out of marriage remains the worst shame a girl can bring to her family, parents take due attention for their social status and position in the community.

### **5.7. Fear of the *Qomo Qär* Stigma**

Parents fear that their daughters could not get good husbands and face the *qomo qär* (unmarriagable) stigma in the society. Furthermore, the stigma is basically attached to a daughter and passes to the remaining members of her family, mainly to her parents and the family as a whole.

Therefore, nobody allows his/her daughter to pass the socially acceptable marriage age. As a result, if a girl reached, or is considered as she reached for marriage in whatsoever age she is on the way to whether to protect the fame, honor or respect of her parents in the community, her parents want to marry her at an early age as soon as possible.

One of the key informants, W/ro Asnaq Worku aged 67, from Kuahr Mikael PA narrated the situation in her own words as:

*If a woman deviates from our (community members) norms, it is a great shame on us (parents). Thus, it is not appropriate to give a chance to exercise this value by herself. The life of a girl is so difficult, people in the community start observing since her early ages. Accordingly, she has to be strong and patient and not do any wrong thing. The failure of her to perform her basic duty may ruin the generations-long conveyed*

*reputation and the respect of her family. As a result she has to take care of the good history of her kinship line (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

Since parents of the groom are also too much eager to get a good daughter in-law and family, a girl is obliged to protect herself and get married before making any mistakes. Thus, the longer she waits for a husband, and not being able to get married early the harder to get the good family and husband. Nobody wants her for marriage after the age of her early teens. In general, community members who participated in the study commonly agreed on the idea as follow:

*The family needs both a good child-in-law and good marrying family members. Firstly, marrying families pledged each other about a marriage, at any age of a girl, then the marriage duty and burden is on both of the spouses' family members, because they have already become united through the marriage alliance. As a result, they start a gəɔgəɔ, which continues till the marriage celebration. This marriage is mainly held in a hidden manner (Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs, January–February 2010).*

Even though finding a suitable bride is a difficult task, for the groom's family members, the selection is based on her personal character, mainly based on the community members' attitude and recognition towards her behavior and good manner. Thus, the more she is getting older the more nobody gives attention to her. Hence, the ethnographic research participants revealed the issue at hand as follows:

*Well-to-do and respected families never ask too old girl for a marriage. She has to be too young as much as possible to be asked for marriage. If her age is too old, it is difficult for her to be asked for marriage. The community members hesitated to ask and suspect that there are some misfortune and problem in her life. Thus, wealthiest families would not ask a girl for marriage from such a family. Moreover, all the failures underlined in her family and that is a great shame to them. In general, the more she is old, the fewer requests for marriage and the worst marriage life she would have. Thus, she never succeeded in her marriage life because the groom's family members' calculation regarding her capacity of bearing children is decreased (FGDs with grand parents, parents, community elders and early married girls, Kuahr Mikael and Zeng Mikael PAs, January-February, 2010).*

*Though I didn't want to get married, my parents forced me to do so at the age of 15. Unfortunately, due to social pressures my parents decided to marry me. At the initial stage community members were talking about me and said 'why is she not getting married'. Moreover, every relative of my parents asked me that 'why are you not getting married, every one is getting married? You have to form your own goḡḡo. Do not be foolish; do not think about education and other things. The basic thing is your marriage life. You have to be strong and be proud of your family'. These were the issues community members discussed about me before my marriage (In-depth interview with early married girl, Yemiwedish Teka aged 15, Kuahr Mikael PA, February, 2010).*

Nonetheless, young girls at the age of 18 or 19 may be considered as old ladies when compared with their age mate boys. Moreover, things are worst if they were not asked for marriage, they are already considered as that they become *qomo qär*. So, parents think it is better to get their daughters married at young age. Otherwise if they wait too long the shame is on them and they would be unable to find a good son-in-law and family. In general marrying off their daughters early decreases the anxiety of parents to get with inappropriate groom and family. Thus, marrying off their daughter at an early age provides them insurance for the well-being of their children by protecting their daughters from premarital sex, loss of virginity and unwanted pregnancy, on the one hand and the prestige of the parents as well as the whole family on the other hand.

Similarly one of the key informants, W/ro Ayalnesh Balew, claimed that societal pressure and norms played a pivotal role for her daughter's marriage at the age of 13. Her daughter, Minalush, was the third child of the family and she was forced into marriage when she was grade 4. Apart from starting her formal education lately, she could not continue her schooling after the marriage. Moreover, the situation was explained by her own words as:

*I love my daughter very much; she is the apples of my eyes. She had lots of household and farming duties. We (I and my husband) never advised her about education, rather we saw our work burden. Unfortunately, she got married and left us. That was a horrible time for me. I was not able to manage the household duties alone. Since she was so industrious, my son-in-law loved her, and hesitated to send her to school, and she is on and off on her education. Only God knows about her future fate. I had done my responsibility on her. I married her in a good manner and she is now a good wife. As a result, I do not fear any stigma about her (Zeng Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Similar case was found from one of the key informants, from the parents' generation. She was forced to marry at the age of 12, before 17 years, and now she has five children. She expressed the issue at hand in her own words as:

*My parents feared that I would become an old maid (*qomo qär, bäqlo*), and felt a great humiliation on them. They are scared of social stigma. Hence, they pushed me into a marriage at the age of 12. At the initial stage of my marriage life, things were so difficult, mainly household responsibilities and other burdens. Fortunately, I was in a position to manage myself and had a good life. Thanks to God, I have a good house and life. Moreover within 17 years of marriage time I gave birth to five children and I just like my life the way it is. I also see the problem of social pressure as a mother, it is so hard. Community members asked why aren't getting your daughters married, aged 10 and 6. It is too difficult (Kuahr Mikael PA, January 2010).*

In short, early marriage arranged parents believed that their daughters should get married as early as possible. Thus, girls or women are supposed to find an appropriate marriage partner during their teenage years or they would be discriminated and judged as *qomo qär* (unmarriageable). Such prejudice puts young girls as well as their parents under frustration. Moreover, family members believe that the failure is considered as theirs too when their daughter does not get married in her early years. So, they do anything to make sure that the family maintains its pride and social respect through marrying their young daughters at an early age.

### **5.8. Fear of Loss of Virginity and Related Stigmas**

The girls' family honor and prestige is protected by ensuring that their daughter gets married as virgin. Community members' value virginity of girls before marriage, thus marriage is accepted to safeguard the family's honour (DelCampo & DelCampo, 1999; Sweetman, 2003). "If she is not a virgin, she and her family are disgraced and the marriage is dissolved" (UN ECA 1999, cited in Guday, 2005:45). Moreover, "since a young woman's virginity was understood as a moral as well as a physical condition, family and church conspired to keep women 'pure'" (Sommers and Whitehead, 1998, cited in Guday, 2005:53). Thus fears about premarital sexual activity and rumors about it scampering an opportunity to get married for girls at their early ages.

Community members further acknowledged that any pregnancy in marriage, including early marriage, at any age is acceptable and is a good act, while pregnancy of girls at their majority age, even above the age of 25, outside marriage is socially unacceptable. Thus, teenage pregnancy within an early marriage is a socially accepted act and it further reaffirms the entry of teenage girls into a womanhood status and to communal life. Moreover, it is the main reason stated by most of the community elders and Orthodox Christian fathers that pregnancy outside marriage vows is a dishonored act for the family and it is not allowed by God. Religion has an influence on early marriage and it is mainly linked to virginity because it is a major indication of her "purity" (Alemante, 2004). Accordingly, since she is respected to be virgin as well as her purity is acknowledged more in not having a child before marriage, having a child out of wedlock reduces the chances of ever marrying. Moreover, Popenoe & Whitehead (2004:2) noted that "having children is still one of the least desirable characteristics a potential marriage partner can possess".

The Ethnographic data gathered from parents and community elders revealed that parents do not want to let their daughter free and see their death. Thus, they strictly protect the fate of their daughters. They also fear that if a girl does not get married at an early age, she will 'sleep with many men', and nobody asks her for marriage at her later age. Thus, it is difficult for a girl to get a husband when she gets older and older. They further recognized that they are responsible for protecting their daughters from the social stigmas.

### **5.9. To Get Male Protection and Male Labor Force**

If a woman loses her husband by death or through divorce, it is common to marry off her daughter and get the protection as well as labor of her son-in-law. Moreover, since the target is to get the labor and protection of the son-in-law, the marriage arrangement and process is unusual. Thus, a girl never goes to her husband parents' home, rather, the husband comes to her mother's home and serves the family.

Similarly, early marriage is also practiced to those who are helpless and in need of human labor. As a result, this pattern helps to get a male labor force. This mainly takes place when a husband died. At this time, a widowed woman needs the men labor for farming (ploughing) activities. Thus, she might also let her daughter live in her mother's homestead together with her husband, who is supposed to look after his mother-in-law, along side, his own *goğğo*. Fortunately, children are accepting the order of their parents. Unwillingness to accept their parents' decision is considered as deviating from the local community's custom and tradition. The following case explains the issue at hand.

#### ***Case 8: Hidden Early Marriage Arrangement and the Demand for Farm Labor***

W/ro Bizuye has three children (2 females, aged 20 and 15 and one son, aged 11). Her husband died six years ago. For different reasons, all of her children are not supporting her. Since the older girl got married and lives in another village it was difficult to W/ro Bizuye to handle the household duties and the family by her own. Their neighbors who had been giving help in the previous time stopped their action after the death of her husband. As a result, W/ro Bizuye badly needed a son-in-law to get his labor for farm and related activities. Thus, she was forced to marry off her child, Sinkinesh, at an early age.

The marriage took place in a very systematic and hidden manner. What has been done was that the husband of Sinkinesh, Gizew, came to W/ro Bizuye's home and lived as one of the family members and performs the farming activity as if it was his own. Fortunately, the deep-rooted relationship between the fathers of the marrying spouses played a pivotal role to W/ro Bizuye's tactic to be more hidden.

W/ro Bizuye explained to the non-relatives as Gizew is in her home for labor support. However, neighbors and most community members knew everything and the slaughtered sheep is not for the funeral memory of her deceased husband too. The researcher also witnessed that the 15 years old girl, Sinikinesh, lives with her husband in their own hut (*goğgo*) in her mother's homestead.

Similarly, W/ro Bizuye witnessed the situation in her own words as "I am a 40 years old woman, my husband died six years ago. In our marriage, we got three children and our first daughter got married at the age of 14, and she gave birth to two children. *Mällaku yimäsgän* (thanks to St. Mikael) I got a chance to become a grand-mother. However, after the death of my husband I faced the problem of working hands for farm activities. Nobody wants to help me in farming activities; my only option was to hire labor workers under the agreement of *ərboñña and qurṭ*. Unfortunately, both of the laborers were not working wholeheartedly and they were not trustworthy. They were also not good in ploughing. Thus, I was left with the only option of marrying my daughter and get the help of my son-in-law. So that he could work in the farm as his own. I lived the last six years in a dark manner so I needed some rest and support. So, to solve all the above mentioned problems, I decided to marry my daughter in a hidden manner. I wished that I should have to give my daughter to *Mergeta Aberawork's* son, Gizew, who had been in a good relationship with my deceased husband. Every procedure and arrangement had taken place with the full support and advice of *Mergeta Aberawork*. He is also in a great need of marrying my daughter, Sinikinesh, to his son, for the continuity of the long-lived, close friendship between us. On these grounds, I let Gizew marry my daughter. Since I need his labor for the farm I could not follow the customary marriage procedure, which dictates that a wife should go to her husband's family, and I let him (my son-in-law) to build his own hut (*goğgo*) in my own *awdamma* (homestead). At this time, all the questions about his existence in my homestead had been answered by saying that he is here to give me farm labor support since we had a good

relationship, and everybody trusted me. I hope I will hold a great wedding feast when she gives a birth” (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).

The aforementioned case does not proceed in the “formal” way of marriage arrangement procedure, which states a ‘wife’ should go to her husband’s home and reside there, and hence it does not rearrange the living and life situation of the husband’s family members. Accordingly, the situation is on the other continuum of the social rearrangement structure. As a result, marriage is a rearrangement of social structure as well as any arrangement of persons in institutionalized relationships. Through marriage certain existing relationships are changed due to the bride’s residential change (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1970; Tuupainen, 1970; Keesing, 1975; Barnard & Spencer, 2002). However, in **Case 8** of the study, the existing relationship is changed in the bride’s family home than the groom’s home. However, this arrangement, as Radcliffe- Brown argued, enables persons to live together and co-operate with one another in an orderly social life (Dumont, 2006).

By the same token, Sinkinesh narrated the situation as follows:

*My mother has raised me both as a father and a mother. After the death of my father it was difficult for the family to lead the life harmoniously. Because of her effort, thanks to God, I was able to be a good girl. So, keeping and accepting her decision is one of the great satisfactions in my life. Before my father died both of my parents were telling me how a full-fledged marriage life looks like. They did not even tell us (me and my siblings) about changes one can achieve through ‘formal’ education. Accordingly, nobody in our family member blamed them for not letting us go to school. All of us did not have any interest to education. Hence, my elder sister did not refuse when she was told that she was going to marry. During that time I expected she was happy to marry but now I realized that she did that just to keep the order of our parents. When I saw my mother, she was in trouble, I wanted to help her. My mother was too happy when she saw the giving birth of my sister. That is my first time, after the death of my father; my mother became happy and so far-fetched. I became too much desirous of being to be my sister. My sister was always blessed by my mother for her giving birth and of making my mother a grand mother. When my mother called me and told the entire plan about my marriage, I cried but she explained to me all the merits of marriage and my future great fate too. She further told me that there was no one around to help us, and told me everything about what she planned to do. I agreed with her plan and collaborated with her in all ways (Kuahr Mikael PA, February 2010).*

Thus, the aforementioned case is in line with the proposition of Bartz and Nye (1970) that when only one or no parent is present in the home of the boy or girl, it is more likely early marriage

will occur. Thus W/ro Bizuye giving Sinkinesh away for marriage in order to get labor support from the husband of her daughter. The death of her husband is, therefore, causes W/ro Bizuye to be frustrated enough to look for option of getting assistant in farming activities. As a result such occasions open the door for marriage of daughters with a man who would give labor support. Sinkinesh also shows the determination to her mother by cooperating in all instances. She wants to prove that she can do all the proposals of her mother to ease up her mother's life burden.

On the other side, if children lost both of their parents by death, neighbors and family members marry off one of the daughters and sustain the life of the children for a responsible man who will look after the family's farming and other activities. Thus, the recruited husband has the duty of protecting the family as well as he is responsible for his marriage life. These activities, in general, show that men are viewed as dependable for the wellbeing of a family in terms of providing the basic necessities and protection. Moreover, if the children's parents are too old it is also possible for the practice of early marriage arrangement. Similar arguments have been found in Alemante (2004)'s and Guday (2005)'s ethnographic findings.

## CHAPTER SIX

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. Summary of Major Findings

In this sub-section the major findings of the study are briefly summarized as follows.

- The trend of early marriage arrangements among the studied peasant communities of Fogera *Woreda*, the study area, has been changed from the public wedding feasts to the hidden ceremonies taking place in the name of social and religious gatherings and other events. Regarding the prevalence of the hidden arrangements of early marriage, the extended case studies, key informants as well as focus group discussants revealed that such mechanisms of early marriage arrangements are very common.
- Parents in the studied peasant communities arrange early marriage for their daughters due to economic, socio-cultural and other interrelated reasons. The major reasons include: (1) economic factors related with parents' socio-economic status; (2) socio-cultural reasons such as parents' fear of their daughters' loss of virginity before marriage and related social stigmas, parents' fear of the *qomo qār* (being unmarriageable) stigma for their daughters, parents' desire to have a male guardian for their daughter and their desire to continue and extend their family line; (3) parents' lack of hope in formal education; and (4) female-headed heads' desire to get male protection and male labor force.
- The nature of the current practice of early marriage in the studied peasant communities is both visible and invisible. It is visible for local community members, but it is invisible for the local level formal legal officers such as the local courts and judges. Of course, local level government institutions are exerting efforts to implement the federal as well as the regional laws legislating against the practice of early marriage. However, the community members are not willing to cooperate with these formal institutional efforts to prevent the

hidden arrangements of early marriage. Instead, the local community members, council of elders and religious leaders facilitate the hidden arrangements of the practice.

## 6. 2. Conclusion

The ethnographic data revealed that parents in the studied peasant communities of Fogera *Woreda* are currently arranging early marriages for their daughters due to the above mentioned economic, socio-cultural and other interrelated factors. The practice is taking place in a hidden manner to escape from legal detections because early marriage arranging parents and its facilitators are well aware of the illegality of the practice. The local community members also collaborate to hide the early marriage arrangements of other parents because they also want to arrange their daughters' marriage in the same way, which is the best option designed by the members of the local community since the formal laws forbid the practice.

Though most of the reviewed studies considered early marriage as a backward, traditional and harmful practice as well as the regional and federal laws forbid it, community members of the study area still have justifications for the prevailing hidden practice of early marriage arrangements, particularly for girls. As a result, girls are getting into marriage at their early age with their parents' practical reasons and explanations (see the Case Studies for the details).

Initially the study selected two PAs as research sites in Fogera *Woreda*. These PAs were selected for several reasons in order to perform the investigation comprehensively. Kuahr Mikael is 7 kilometers away from the *Woreda* capital, Woreta, and Zeng Mikael 34 far from the *Woreda* capital. According to the study the proximity of Kuahr Mikael affects early marriage arranged parents a lot, as *Woreda* women and justice office officials and police officers keenly observe the situation. However, such inspection, definitely altered by early marriage arranging parents with a complex technique while officials arrived in the area. Such occasions are set in a way to safely conduct early marriage of a girl without the notice of concerned bodies. Moreover, the community members use deceptive techniques in the arrangement of early marriage that change from time to time. Thus, parents arranged early marriage hiddenly because the practice is presently unacceptable before the court of law. As a result, parents arrange early marriage for

their daughters in the pretext of a certain family and communal gathering occasions. Some early marriage arranging parents set the arrangement to coincide with a particular Saint's day celebration and others used to accomplish their hidden interest underneath a commemoration of the death of a family member.

The other research site, Zeng Mikael is relatively farther to the *Woreda* capital, Woreta. This created the gap that *Woreda* officials do not have access to the on-goings of hidden early marriage arrangements. It is most likely for the PA officials to look after early marriage concerns of the area. This is often insufficient since most officials are interconnected with the community through family lines which forces them to be reluctant over the practice of early marriage which is supposed to be exposed to the executive body. Such reluctance of PA officials due to marriage and blood relationship with the community members also exists in Kuahr Mikael. However, it does not seem very intensive, as *Woreda* officials also intervene in terms of inspecting disguised early marriage arrangements.

Most previous reviewed findings put forward the fact that poverty intensively fuels early marriage in a community. They also present their justifications on how early marriage is geared by the poverty level of parents. This study, however, views the deviation that families with a better economic background are mostly tempted for early marriage of their daughters. From the economic point of view of the study findings in relation to early marriage, it is supposedly more frequent in its existence in Kuahr Mikael PA which is the wealthier PA of the two. Hence community members produce crops and even vegetables three times annually which are three fold of that of the production in Zeng Mikael. Thus most farmers in Kuahr Mikael possess relatively richer household which encourages them to organize early marriage for one or more of their daughters. As a result early marriage is observed to be fueled by a better economic standard which is obviously viewed in Kuahr Mikael's case.

Formal education is also another phenomenon which is disfavored by most parents in Kuahr Mikael because of their high economic status. It is a bit astonishing that parents with a better income discourage their children from formal education for poverty is normally the trap that disallows children's schooling. These wealthy parents believe that the best thing their children

can get is becoming a civil servant in the local community. Thus, such jobs do not have social dignity in the area and parents seem to be disintegrated in the community by their children could not get better economic wellbeing through formal education. Here it is clearly seen that the life standard and income of local farmers is far better than that of "educated" civil servants. Education in general is viewed from the point of view of the income generating means in the future life of the children. Consequently, families prefer to have their children married with a dependable in-law in order to consolidate their wealth opportunities.

Moreover those married girls got the status of womanhood and adulthood while they got birth. And hence this finding in line with Goldscheider (2000) explanation that full of adulthood normally involves attaining stable adult work and family roles in which one is providing for oneself and others, in some combination as a worker, partner, and parent. Childhood, in contrast, is normally associated with dependency on one's own parents. The transition to adulthood, then, comprises both the end of childhood and progress on the central responsible roles of adulthood. Thus a child girl became an adult due to her responsibility and role in her in-laws household.

From the point of view of religious affiliations in relation to early marriage, parents are engaged in covenant that pledges their daughters to a man to another family. Such verbal arrangements are not at all breached by the two promising parents. Most parents believe violation of a covenant to give their daughter to a promising man as denial of their God in their spiritual life. Thus they would organize an early marriage to keep their pledges. Moreover, all disguise early marriage is also approved of by religious fathers who are considered all knowing and reverend by the local community members. These religious fathers approve of the early marriages boosting the confidence of families that they are also being accepted by their God. Such recognition has an encouragement effect on people who aspire to take such cases to their worshipping places.

The fact that the community members intertwined through family line, marriage and religion paved a way to them in covering of every secret one another. As a matter of fact, some acts, like early marriage, if exposed, are punishable. This obviously needs the cooperation of community members for the executive body to act in order to affect the situation. Nevertheless, this does not often occur because of the close family relationship among the community members. However

such integration is deep-rooted that even the PA officials are also closely integrated with families. These circumstances affect officials in a way that they do not reveal the act of early marriage even though they find it out before hand. Thus, one can argue that these were direct results of community members' familiarity and trust each other.

It is a mere reality that a law has been enacted against early marriage; but the effect is not seen as such because of lack of cooperation from stakeholders and the entire community members. This study strongly puts forward the argument that the existence of the law can not guarantee the "abolishment" of early marriage from the society. It is obvious that the law can impact people at least to accomplish their proposed early marriages underneath several social occasions and religious celebrations; but it is not sufficient to dry the cause from its spring.

The study also found the gap between the legal standards and perception of parents in particular and community members in general about daughter marriageable age. The law determines the actual age of marriage as 18 and, however, community members consider the physiological appearance, daughters family well being and other elements to pull their fingers on a girl in regards to her marriage. This gap is widened by community members through their attempt in organizing early marriage in a disguised manner deceiving the executive body.

Comprehensively the complications behind early marriage arrangements in the study area are intermingled with one another making the law weakened and almost failing to control the situation. As one of practices of a society, early marriage has been understood in relation to interlinked socio-cultural systems and integrations. Various reasons have been in due for parents, community members and CBOs while they arrange and collaborated with the hidden arrangement of early marriage. It could be advantageous to draft such a law to enforce the practice of early marriage cases in the community; but it will obviously be ineffective if the executive body does not work hand in hand with community members. Here cooperation is demanded from the local community in regards to early marriage cases from legal means, but that again does not guarantee the whole process. So the social values which accepts early marriage needs to be addressed. The researches and observations need to be conduct in a way complying with the community's actual characteristics in terms of the beliefs surrounding the act of early marriage.

### 6.3. Recommendations

Governmental and other policy makers need to consider the actual community setting with regard to the parental reasons and justifications of early marriage from emic point of view.

Governmental and other organization and institutions need to consider the community's actual characteristics, beliefs and attitudes towards early marriage in order to address the situation from the ground which avoids cases of missing the point during intervention and training sessions. Such programs are supposed to address the proposed situations if they match with the actual circumstances of the community members.

Social values, community pressure, religious role, "educational level", income of households and other specific parental related issues in regards of early marriage arrangements need serious and in-depth intervention based on the emic point of view.

Community gatekeepers (like CBOs, gender activists and PA officials) are required to obtain sufficient training in order to narrow the gap between the legal implementations and social values. This in turn can bring about a couple of advantages. One is that community members will be able to resolve problems and legal clashes with their own, and the other is that there could be better consensus between legal bodies and the local community members.

The negative connotation terms practically used by policy makers, the executive body, institutions, organizations and researchers have an effect that widens the gap with the society. The community believes that such act of early marriage is acceptable and normal according to their point of view. Thus, terms such as backward, traditional, harmful, e.t.c. should be carefully watched from the emic point of view so as to avoid resistance of findings to the benefits of the community members.

Therefore, to deal with the current hidden arrangement procedures of early marriage in the studied peasant communities of Fogerea *Woreda* in South Gonder Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State, specific intervention measures need to be developed based on the socio-cultural values and economic realities of the rural peasant communities.

Finally, the study suggests the need for further study on the changing and hidden arrangement of early marriage with particular emphasis on how to fill the gap between socio-cultural values and economic realities of the rural peasant communities and the laws legislating against the practice in the Amhara National Regional State.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: Primary Data Collection Guidelines

### Appendix 1A: Key Informant Interview Guideline

**General Introduction:** The purpose of this study is to gather information about the changing and hidden arrangements patterns of early marriage in your community. The information obtained from the interview will be used only for research purposes and it will be kept confidential.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. The Research Site and Personal Data

##### *Research Site*

- Woreda* \_\_\_\_\_
- PA \_\_\_\_\_

##### *Personal Data*

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Age \_\_\_\_\_
- Sex \_\_\_\_\_
- Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
- Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
- Educational Level \_\_\_\_\_
- Responsibility or Social Roles \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Background Information

- How long you lived in this *Woreda* or PA?
- Do you own any property? If yes (Probe: land (in size), Cattle (in Number), house (in type), if any please specify \_\_\_\_\_)
- How many children do you have? (Probe: \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ F)
- What is the total number of your household members?
- What do you know about your *Woreda*/ PA?

### 3. The Nature of Early Marriage

- How do you explain and understand about the nature of early marriage arrangements in your community?

(Probe: - both the historical and current pattern of early marriage arrangement -The current hidden feature of early marriage arrangement)

- Have you observed early marriage arrangement? What kinds of mechanism do parents use in arranging the marriage?
- What do you say about the current prevalence rate of early marriage compared to the previous years? (Probe: before 20 and 10 years)

### 4. Major Reasons for Early Marriage Arrangements

- What are the major reasons for early marriage?
- Could you explain the major reasons for early marriage arrangements? (Probe: Both the historical and the current reasons).
- What type of mechanisms do the parents use while they arrange early marriage in a hidden manner? And why?

### 5. The Role of CBOs and Other Institutions in Promoting and Preventing Early Marriage Arrangements

- What type of CBOs and other institutions are available in your locality? What are their general and specific roles? What roles they play in early marriage arrangements? (Probe: Preventing or Promoting)
- What do you explain about the role of CBOs and other institutions in regard to early marriage?
- Do you have any other formal and/ or informal mechanisms of early marriage arrangement? (Probe: in promoting and preventing)
- What types of intervention activities take place to alleviate early marriage? Are there policies, strategies, regulations legislating against early marriage?
  - Do you have any additional idea or opinion about the issue at hand?

## Appendix 1B: In-Depth Interview Guideline

Designed for early married girls and women (this interview will be administered to capture extended case studies with Early Married Grand parents, Parents and Children)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. The Research Site and Personal Data

1.1. *Research Site* \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1.2. Personal Data

- ❖ Name \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ Age \_\_\_\_\_ (do you know your birthday?)
- ❖ Marital Status (Probe: 1<sup>st</sup> marriage, 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage, 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage e.t.c)
- ❖ Age at First Marriage \_\_\_\_\_
- ❖ Educational Level \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Background Information

- ❖ How long have you lived in this community? What do you know about the community?
- ❖ Do you own any property? If yes, (Probe: land (in size), Cattle (in Number), house (in type), if any please specify \_\_\_\_\_)
- ❖ How was your marriage arranged? (Probe: through your parents or by your choice)
- ❖ Do you have children? (If yes, Probe: Number of children \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_ M)
- ❖ What is the total number of your family size?

### 3. The Nature of Early Marriage

- ❖ Would you please explain the marriage arrangement process in your community? (Probe: both the historical and the current pattern. The changing and hidden feature of early marriage arrangement).
- ❖ In what manner did your marriage arrangement take place?
- ❖ How do you describe the current marriage arrangement process?
- ❖ What do you think about the appropriate age of marriage? (Probe: for boys/girls: why)
- ❖ How do you describe the prevalence rate of early marriage in your locality? (Probe: decreasing (how?) increasing (why?)).

#### 4. Major Reasons for Early Marriage Arrangements

- ❖ What do you think about the root causes of early marriage?
- ❖ Why do parents arrange early marriage for their daughters in your locality? How?
- ❖ What are the major changes in early marriage arrangements in your locality? (Probe: both the nature and pattern)
- ❖ Are you (For the parents and grand parents) aware of the harmful consequences of early marriage, if yes, why did you arrange it?

#### 5. The Role of CBOs and Other Institutions in Promoting and Preventing Early Marriage Arrangements

- ❖ What is the promoting role of CBOs (*Idhr, Equb, Maber, Tsige, e.t.c.*) and other institutions in your community in relation to early marriage arrangements?
- ❖ What is the preventing role of CBOs (*Idhr, Equb, Maber, Tsige, e.t.c.*) and other institutions in your community in relation to early marriage arrangements?
- ❖ Does any organization or institution try to stop your (early married girls) marriage?
- Do you have any additional opinion or idea about early marriage?

# Appendix 1C: FGD Guideline for Early Married Girls

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Research Site \_\_\_\_\_

2. Background Information \_\_\_\_\_

✚ Age Group \_\_\_\_\_

✚ Age at First Marriage (Probe: Number of marriage 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>...)

✚ Educational Level \_\_\_\_\_

✚ Number of Children (if any, Number \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ F)

3. The Nature of Early Marriage

✚ Would you please explain the marriage arrangement process in your community/ locality?  
(Probe: Both the previous and the current arrangements)

✚ How do you describe the prevalence of early marriage? (Probe: is it increasing or decreasing)

✚ In what manner did your parents arrange your marriage?

✚ Please describe your life before and after marriage?

4. Major Reasons for Early Marriage Arrangements

✚ What are the major reasons for early marriage arrangement in your community?

✚ Why did your parents arrange early marriage for you?

✚ In what manner do your parents arrange your marriage?

✚ For what reasons did your parents arrange early marriage for you?

5. The Role of CBOs and other Institutions in Promoting and Preventing Early Marriage Arrangements

✚ Does any organization or institution try to stop your marriage?

✚ Would you please explain the role of different institutions and CBOs in your marriage?

(Probe: the role of *edir*, *maber*, *tsige*, e.t.c. in your marriage)

➤ Do you have an additional point or opinion about the issue at hand?

## **Appendix 1D: FGD Guideline for key informants (religious leaders, community leaders and knowledgeable individuals, women and parents...e.t.c.)**

### **1. The Research Site and FGD Participants' Personal Data**

**1.1. Research Site** \_\_\_\_\_

**1.2. FGD Participants Personal Data**

- ✓ Group Number \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Age Category \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Sex \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Educational Level (Probe: religious education, Basic education, if any please specify)
- ✓ Role in the community \_\_\_\_\_

### **2. Background Information**

- ✓ Could you please tell me about social values and norms related to marriage and/or early marriage in your community/ locality?
- ✓ Is there any change about early marriage arrangement process or pattern?

### **3. The Nature of Early Marriage**

- ✓ How do you see the current prevalence of early marriage arrangement compared to your generation? (Probe: including its nature and prevalence)

### **4. Major Reasons for Early Marriage Arrangements**

- ✓ How do you describe the major reasons for early marriage?(Probe: both the previous and the current patterns)
- ✓ Could you please explain the major reasons for early marriage arrangement in the previous and present times?
- ✓ Are the parents or community members aware of the harmful consequence of early marriage? If so, why did they arrange early marriage for their daughters?
- ✓ What do you think about the major factors that paved a way to arrange early marriage in a hidden manner? (Probe: cultural, religious, personal and other reasons )

### **5. The Role of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and other Institutions in Promoting and Preventing Early Marriage Arrangements**

- ✓ What is the role of CBOs and other institutions in relation to early marriage arrangement? ( Probe: the previous and the current role)
- ✓ Would you please explain the promoting roles of CBOs and other institutions?
- ✓ Would you please explain the preventing roles of CBOs and other institutions?
- ✓ Do you have any additional point or opinion about the issue at hand?

## Appendix 2: Summary of Primary Data Collection Sources

Instruments	Participants	Number of Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Informant interview with officials</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Woreda officials               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Woreda women affairs officer(1)</li> <li>Woreda police officer(1)</li> <li>Women and children rights protection head(1)</li> <li>Judge and/ attorney of the Woreda court(2)</li> <li>Any other relevant key informant(1)</li> </ul> </li> <li>PA officials (leader)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kebele leaders (2 informants, 1 from each PA)</li> <li>Any relevant key informant(2 informants, 1 from each PA)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Informant interview with health officers</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any relevant key informant from Woreda health institution(1)</li> <li>Any relevant key informants from PA health posts(2)</li> </ol>	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Informant interview with different institution heads and/ members of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Religious leaders(2)</li> <li>CBO leaders and/ members(6,3 informants from each PA)</li> <li>Council of elders(2)</li> <li>Any other relevant key informant(2)</li> </ul>	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Informant interview with female students advisory committee heads/representatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two female students advisory committee heads or representatives from the two primary schools</li> </ul>	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-depth interview (case studies of) with early married girls and women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grand Parents(6, 3 from each PA)</li> <li>Parents(6, 3 from each PA)</li> <li>Daughters/ early marries girls(8, 4 from each PA)</li> </ul>	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Six FGD's with parents and early married girls/ women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 FGD's with Six female household heads (1 FGDs from each PA)</li> <li>2 FGD's with Six male household heads(1 FGDs from each PA)</li> <li>2 FGD's with Six early married girls(1 FGDs from each PA)</li> </ul>	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four FGD's with council of elders and/ knowledgeable individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 FGD's with Six council of elders, 3 from each PA</li> <li>2 FGD's with six knowledgeable individuals, 3 from each PA</li> </ul>	12

### Appendix 3: Profiles of Primary Data Sources

#### Appendix 3A: Profiles of Key Informant Interview Participants

NO	Name	Sex	Age	Description
1	Abraraw Bilew	M	36	Administrator of Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
2	Addis Gashaw	M	49	One of the members of Mikael Mahber in Kuahr Mikael PA
3	Aderajew Workineh	M	79	Council of elder and knowledgeable individual in Zeng Mikael PA
4	Asnaq Worku	F	67	One of the members of Maryam Mahber in Kuahr Mikael PA
5	Ayalnesh Balew	F	49	One of the members of Maryam Mahber in Zeng Mikael PA
6	Ayichesh Megersssa	F	38	Deputy head of Fogera Woreda Women's Affairs Office
7	Baze Fenta	M	72	Religious father in Kuahr Mikael däbör (church) Peasant Association
8	Belaynew Asmamaw	M	29	Administrator of Zeng Mikael Peasant Association
9	Dagnachew Kinde	M	66	Council of elder and knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael PA
10	Degu Sisay	M	89	Knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
11	Dejene Amare	M	42	Fogera Woreda police officer
12	Desta Mersha	M	54	A person in charge for one of the iddir's Kuahr Mikael PA
13	Enatihun Abera	F	54	One of the members of Maryam Mahber in Zeng Mikael PA
14	Endalew Asmamaw	M	27	Fogera Woreda women and children rights protection head
15	Ermias Birhan	M	29	Attorney in the Fogera Woreda court
16	Enunu Tasew	F	21	Health extension worker in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
17	Getnet Melese	M	41	Head of Fogera Woreda Justice Office
18	Lidya Baye	F	27	Head of Woreda health institution
19	Likealem Asmare	F	40	Gender Activist in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
20	Masresha Bayileygn	M	74	One of the members of Mikael Mahber in Zeng Mikael PA
21	Ngussie Assefa	M	43	Fogera Woreda Agricultural and Rural Development Office Cereal crops production officer
22	Qegne Biset	M	67	A person in charge for one of the iddir's Zeng Mikael PA
23	Tadesse Moges	M	65	Religious father in Zeng Mikael däbör (church) Peasant Association
24	Tadfalech Werqineh	F	25	Health extension worker in Zeng Mikael Peasant Association
25	Tekalign Molla	M	72	Knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
26	Tiruye Teka	F	34	Gender Activist in Zeng Mikael Peasant Association
27	Worku Mulat	M	37	Head of Fogera Woreda Agricultural and Rural Development Office

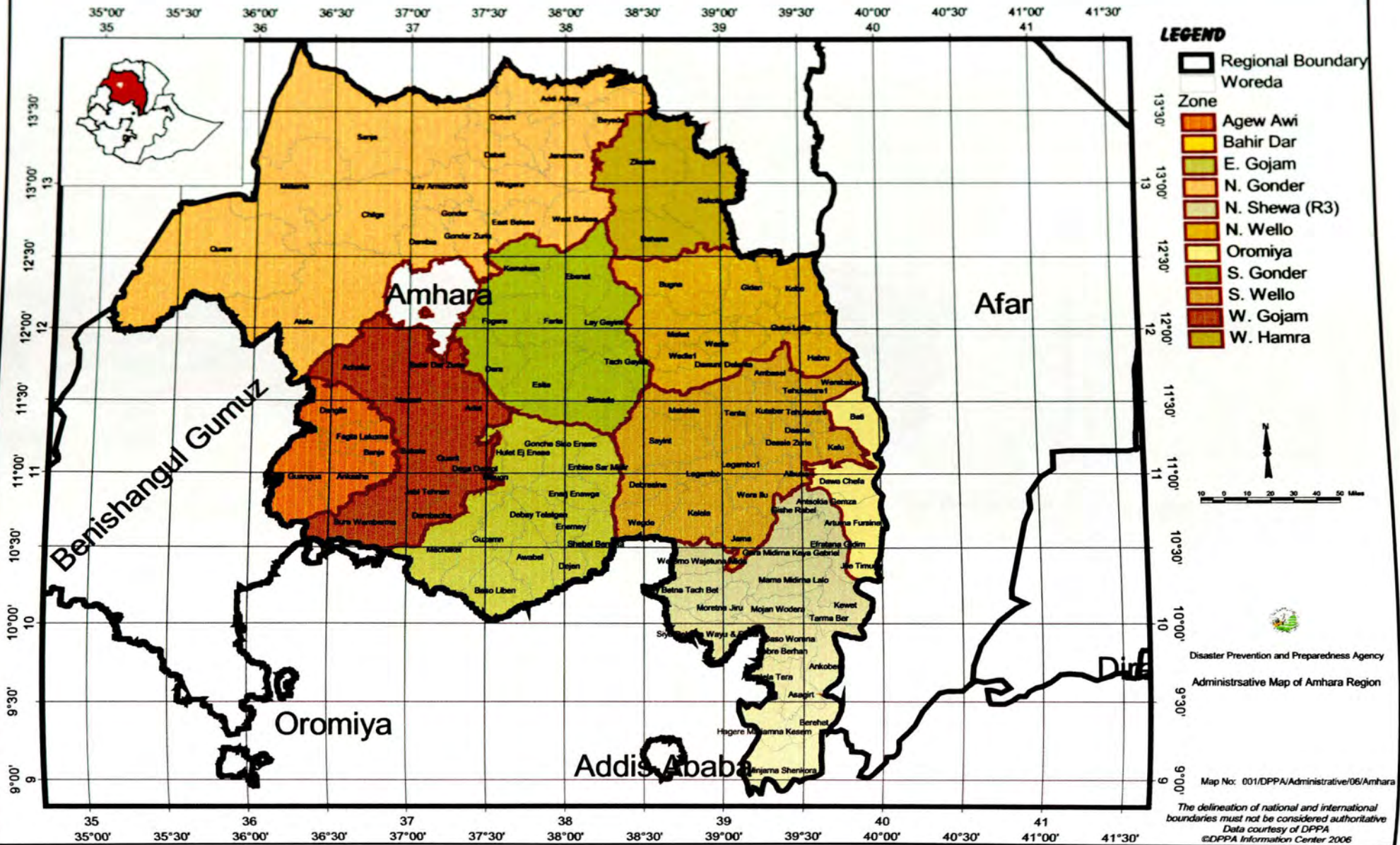
### Appendix 3B: Profiles of Case Study participants

No	Name	Age	Age at first marriage	Age Promised to marriage
1	Ajebush Dessalegn	12	12	10
2	Alemitu Zewdu	16	14	7
3	Alemniesh Zeweld	13	13	At her birth
4	Ayalnesh Balew	42	17	17
5	Birqe Abebaw	87	16	13
6	Dasash Yalelet	29	12	At her birth
7	Etagen Dessalegn	14	14	11
8	Feleku Bitew	18	11	6
9	Fetfite Birega	68	9	4
10	Mare Destaw	10	10	10
11	Mareshet Getaw	52	16	16
12	Minalu Melese	74	13	At her birth
13	Minalush Kassa	13	13	4
14	Minalush Shega	39	12	8
15	Shewaye Gebrye	16	16	14
16	Sinafikish Belete	14	10	5 1/2
17	Tadelech Wuletaw	8	8	At her birth
18	Tenaye Melak	14	14	6
19	Tirumar Asmamaw	56	15	10
20	Yemiwedish Teka	15	15	5

### Appendix 3C: Profiles of Focus Group Discussion Participants

No	Name	Sex	Age	Description
1	Abebaw Belay	M	92	Knowledgeable individual in Zeng Mikael PA
2	Abraraw Gezaw	M	58	Council of Elder in Kuahr Mikael PA
3	Alamne Gebeyaw	F	42	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
4	Alebel Tasew	M	54	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
5	Alechign Taye	F	16	Early Married Girl in Zeng Mikael PA
6	Ashagre Kibeb	M	64	Council of Elder in Zeng Mikael PA
7	Ashebir Damte	M	75	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
8	Asmamaw Gobeze	M	81	Council of Elder in Zeng Mikael PA
9	Azalech Derese	F	14	Early Married Girl in Kuahr Mikael PA
10	Baynes Gelaye	M	76	Knowledgeable individual in Zeng Mikael PA
11	Bizuye kassa	F	40	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael PA
12	Chernet Akalu	M	87	Knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael PA
13	Dessalegn Meshesha	M	40	Household Head in Zeng Mikael PA
14	Desta Mersha	M	65	Council of Elder in Kuahr Mikael PA
15	Enatalem Gebyaw	F	16	Early Married Girl in Kuahr Mikael PA
16	Enunu Asmare	F	11	Early Married Girl in Zeng Mikael PA
17	Fenta Destaye	F	26	Household Head Kuahr Mikael PA
18	Firew Biyarge	M	56	Council of Elder in Kuahr Mikael PA
19	Gezahegn Admasu	M	63	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association
20	Gizachew Baze	M	79	Knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael PA
21	Kebebush Biyarge	F	65	Household Head in Zeng Mikael PA
22	Tirumar Teka	F	54	Household Head in Zeng Mikael PA
23	Mare Destaw	F	10	Early Married Girl in Kuahr Mikael PA
24	Minalush Lewl	F	13	Early Married Girl in Zeng Mikael PA
25	Tesfaye Yihun	M	74	Knowledgeable individual in Zeng Mikael PA
26	Wuletaw Yilma	M	65	Household Head in Zeng Mikael Peasant Association
27	Worke Meqoya	M	55	Council of Elder in Zeng Mikael PA
28	Yalew Belachew	M	89	Knowledgeable individual in Kuahr Mikael PA
29	Yemiwedish Kasaw	F	65	Household Head in Zeng Mikael Peasant Association
30	Zeweld Worke	M	64	Household Head in Kuahr Mikael Peasant Association

# Administrative Region and Woreda Map of Amhara



# Map of the Study Area



## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this Thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the Thesis have been duly acknowledged

Name.....*Eshetu Ewnetu*.....  
Signature.....*[Handwritten Signature]*.....

Place and date of submission

Addis Ababa University, July 2010