Re-IMAGINE Baseline Report

Delaying Marriage and Improving Adolescent Reproductive Health in Niger

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Prepared by:

CARE

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Acronyms

CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CEFMU	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions
CGE	Centre for Girls Education
CGENF	Comité de Gestion de l'Éducation Non Formelle
COGES	Comité de Gestion des Etablissement Scolaires
cRCT	Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GC	Girls' Collective
GSE	General Self-Efficacy Scale
PRSP	Programme de Résilience pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
Re-IMAGINE	Re-Inspiring Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Autonomous Pathways
SAA	Social Analysis and Action
SHEA	Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse
SMC	School Management Committee
UCSD	University of California, San Diego
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UW	University of Washington
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

Executive Summary

The Re-Inspiring Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Autonomous Pathways (Re-IMAGINE) program (2024–2029) seeks to delay child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) and delay first pregnancy among out-of-school, unmarried adolescent girls aged 11 to 15 years in Zinder, Niger. Adapting the successful "Pathways" model implemented by the Center for Girls Education (CGE) from Nigeria, CARE and its partners are implementing a cluster-randomized controlled trial (cRCT) to test a comprehensive intervention package that includes academic catch-up programming, social norms engagement, and schooling support as the default pathway for girls, with livelihood training as an alternative pathway. As Niger faces the **highest rates of early marriage** and adolescent pregnancy for girls **in the world**, with rates in the Zinder region even higher than the national average, Re-IMAGINE aims to demonstrate the changes and cost-effectiveness of evidence-based interventions to support girls' futures, adapted from the success achieved for girls in Nigeria.

Re-IMAGINE's baseline study, conducted in mid-2025, consisted of quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative survey randomly sampled 2,500 unmarried, out-of-school adolescent girls (ages 11-15), 900 religious and community leaders, 690 fathers of girls, and 690 mothers of girls. On average, girls who participated in the quantitative survey were 13.1 years old. For the qualitative component, a cross-sectional social norms assessment was conducted, including 22 in-depth interviews and 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore social norms, attitudes, and behaviors among out-of-school adolescent girls and key reference groups in two communities. Following baseline data collection, 4,500 girls were randomized to receive the Re-IMAGINE program interventions, with 1,125 girls randomized to the control group. The first qualitative follow-up assessment will be conducted in mid-2026. The endline evaluation consisting of both quantitative and qualitative studies will be carried out in 2027, following the conclusion of the program. A post-hoc assessment is planned for mid-2028 to assess longer-term program outcomes. The program will also collect costing data over the two years of implementation to assess the cost-effectiveness of the Re-IMAGINE model. Re-IMAGINE's baseline study provides critical insights into the pre-intervention context, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that shape adolescent girls' lives in Zinder.

Findings from this mixed-method baseline study across 95 villages in the Zinder region of Niger confirm that **early marriage is deeply entrenched**, with 87% of girls marrying before age 18 and a median marriage age of 15.4 years. Findings suggest **educational attainment is low**—only 41% of surveyed girls had ever attended school, and only 24% reported they could read and write. Participating girls completed an average of 1.7 years of school, while those who had ever attended school completed an average of 4.3 years. Despite these barriers, **girls expressed strong aspirations**: 70% said they would attend school if they could decide for themselves, and 44% hoped to complete senior secondary education. Reasons girls gave for never attending school included the need to work and their families' refusal to allow them to attend. Reasons girls gave for dropping out of school included the need to work, not wanting to attend school, and academic stagnation. **Girls, parents, and leaders** perceive that it is **acceptable for girls to drop out of school**. Compared with the CGE Pathway program at baseline, Re-IMAGINE girls are 33% less likely to have attended school. Additionally, girls in Nigeria are 13% more likely to report that they can read and write. Parents and leaders found that continuing education is acceptable when girls show strong academic promise, especially if financial support or clear employment prospects are available. Girls reported their **ideal marriage age was 16.7 years**, which is largely aligned with their parents' reports of 16.4 years. Fathers and community leaders were, on average, much less likely than girls themselves to agree or strongly agree that girls marry before 16: while 81% of girls strongly agree or agree, only 61% of fathers and 56% of leaders do so.

In Niger, social norms strongly support early marriage, reinforced by religious and community leaders. Girls perceive greater **community pressure** to marry early than parents or leaders report, and **fathers are widely**

seen as the primary decision-makers for both education and marriage. However, mothers often play a more active role in shaping daughters' choices, while recognizing that these decisions are influenced by a complex web of factors and people, including siblings, extended family, peers, and community leaders. While marriage decisions involve broader networks and more female voices, girls rarely discuss marriage directly with their parents, often relying on intermediaries like older siblings or aunts. Marriage and education are **competing choices** guided by the same logic: faced with poverty and social pressures, families often view early marriage as the best solution for their daughters' overall well-being, economic stability, safety, and social standing, often at the expense of continued education. Additionally, negative sanctions for girls who do not marry early, and for their families, and perceived benefits of early marriage, influence families' decisions. Delaying marriage is viewed as more acceptable by community leaders and parents when they view girls to be "too young," not physically mature, or not engaging with men and boys in "dishonorable" behavior.

Girls who have been educated are more likely to delay marriage and pursue further education first. As Re-IMAGINE is adapting the Pathways model from Nigeria, this report also compares quantitative results from the Pathways to Scale baseline conducted in 2025 to Re-IMAGINE results. These findings underscore the need for interventions that not only **provide access to education** but also **build girls' confidence and self-determination**. Compared with girls participating in the Pathways to Scale baseline, Re-IMAGINE girls are 33% less likely to have been to school and 13% less likely to report that they can read and write. In Nigeria's Pathways baseline, girls reported an ideal age of marriage of 18.7 years, 2 years older than the 16.7 years reported by girls in Niger.

Given the prevalence of social norms that drive early marriage, this report also underscores the need to **closely engage religious and community leaders and parents** who serve as gatekeepers and can become allies for building a shared vision for girls' futures. As fathers are the primary decision-makers for girls' education and marriage, interventions **engaging fathers** as allies are critical to leverage the slightly lower acceptance of early marriage among fathers compared to mothers and girls. The program may also have specific opportunities with younger girls aged 11-13 and their families to shape aspirations early, while working with girls aged 14–15 who may be facing imminent marriage and school dropout. Given the multiple reasons contributing to school non-attendance and dropout, results indicate the **need for multi-level interventions** that pair social norms shifting and improvements in educational quality with financial support for girls' school-related costs. Finally, the program should **leverage "cracks" in prevailing norms**—such as support for academically promising girls or delays in marriage due to financial constraints —to promote positive change and expand opportunities for adolescent girls in Zinder.

The Re-IMAGINE program has integrated these recommendations into its implementation plan with girls' groups for academic catch-up programming and building girls' self-efficacy; into its continual engagement of religious and community leaders and school management committees; the social norms interventions among parents, boys, and community leaders; and schooling and livelihoods support that will be tested for their added contribution in delaying marriage and first pregnancy.

Chapter 1: Background

Contextual Background

In Niger, nearly three in four girls (76%) are married before turning 18, and more than one in four (28%) before 15, comprising the highest rates of child and early forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) in the world.[1] These early unions are tightly connected to Niger, which also has the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the world at 145 births per 1000 girls aged 15 to 19 years.[2] In Zinder, where this study is centered, the situation is even more severe: 87% of girls marry before age 18[3], and the median age of marriage is just 15.4 years[4], well below the national average. The persistence of CEFMU in Niger is largely rooted in social norms, including those emphasizing marriage to strengthen community ties, control adolescent sexuality, or uphold the belief that a woman's value lies primarily in marriage and motherhood. Polygamy also contributes to this practice, with nearly 29% of Nigeriens living in polygamous households.[5]

Maternal complications are the leading cause of death among girls aged 10–19 in Niger, according to WHO, largely due to early pregnancy and limited access to quality maternal health care.[6] CEFMU undermines girls' self-esteem, education, nutrition, income, and overall development.[7] Married girls often experience restrictions on mobility, decision-making, and personal autonomy, reinforcing cycles of social norms affecting women and girls. These realities point to the importance of reaching very young adolescents with interventions that delay marriage and first pregnancy, and support healthier, more empowered transitions to adulthood.

The Government of Niger, alongside its development partners, continues efforts to address the root causes of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy through initiatives promoting girls' education and empowerment.[8] Since 2016, Niger has been a priority country for the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, which equips girls with knowledge, skills, and support networks, expands access to quality services, and strengthens legal protection. Other initiatives, such as Plan International's GirlEngage Niger and the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD), aim to shift harmful social norms affecting adolescent girls, enhance their rights and resilience, and expand access to education and health care.

Progress, however, remains slow due to persistent legal and social barriers. The 1993 Civil Code still allows girls to marry at 15 and boys at 18, with exceptions through parental or presidential consent, while many customary marriages involving minors fall outside formal regulation. Efforts to reform these discriminatory laws have often met resistance from conservative religious leaders, making continued advocacy and inclusive dialogue essential to protect girls' rights. Still, Niger has demonstrated its commitment to ending child marriage by ratifying, with reservations, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The 2019 Niamey Declaration, issued during the ECOWAS First Ladies' Summit, further underscored political will and emphasized girls' education as the most effective strategy to combat early marriage.

[1] Niger Demographic and Health Survey 2012
[2] https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/niger
[3] https://www.unicef.org/niger/media/3076/file/Issue%20Brief%20Child%20Marriage%20Niger%202020.pdf
[4] Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: A Political Economy Analysis of Niger, Iris Group, 2020
[5] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/07/polygamy-is-rare-around-the-world-and-mostly-confined-to-a-few-regions/
[6] https://staging.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2019-08/13%20Niger%20AH27072018.pdf
[7] https://breakthroughactionandresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CEFM-Technical-Brief-Social-Norms.pdf
[8] Country Profile of Phase I: UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage: https://www.unicef.org/media/88836/file/Child-marriage-Niger-profile-2019.pdf

Girls' education is a fundamental pillar of Axis 2: Inclusive Human Capital Development in the current government's Resilience Program for Safeguarding the Homeland (PRSP). This is a crucial legislative framework aimed at combating early marriage and encouraging education, adopted by decree in 2017. It mandates that girls remain in school until age 16. By keeping girls in school, the country is investing directly in its socio-economic resilience and breaking the cycle of poverty. Ensuring girls' access to quality education, vocational and entrepreneurship training, and economic resources enables them to envision futures beyond marriage while strengthening their confidence and decision-making power. CEFMU both limits and stems from restricted educational and economic opportunities, as only 20% of girls in Niger are enrolled in secondary school and 14.8% complete lower secondary.[9] Poverty, social norms favoring boys, and fears of violence against women and girls further discourage school attendance. In Zinder, half of children aged 7–12 years never enroll in school, and nationally, nine in ten cannot read and understand an age-appropriate passage by age ten.[10] The limited reach of the *Passerelle* government catch-up program to reintegrate out-of-school children —just 66 schools in Zinder serving roughly 2,400 learners —highlights the absence of viable alternatives for girls and reinforces the urgency of investing in education and livelihoods as key strategies to end CEFMU.

Re-IMAGINE's design draws from successful programs implemented by CARE and partners in West Africa and globally to delay marriage. From 2016-2022, CARE implemented the Inspiring Married Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Empowered Futures (IMAGINE) program in Zinder, Niger, which demonstrated that community, health provider, and girl-level interventions increased modern contraceptive use and access to resources among married girls 15-19 but did not delay the timing of first birth among married girls. The persistence of early first pregnancy indicated the need to intervene with younger, unmarried girls, guiding Re-IMAGINE's focus on younger and unmarried girls aged 11 to 15 years. In Kaduna State of Nigeria, the Pathways program implemented by CGE from 2018 to 2020 demonstrated the results of academic catch-up programming in mentored safe spaces, engagement with religious and community leaders, and family sensitization and enrollment support on reducing marriage and increasing school enrollment, with every $1 spent estimated to return $2.41 in benefits. In Ethiopia, the 2016 to 2020 Abdiboru program demonstrated the results of combined school re-enrollment, community mobilization, and economic support on adolescent girls aged 10–14, reducing early marriage prevalence by 50% and improving school attendance. In Benin, from 2018 to 2021, the *Projeunes* program showed the contribution of advocacy with community and religious leaders and youth leadership on reducing marriage and halving the birth rate. Re-IMAGINE incorporates the learnings from these programs in its multi-level intervention design, its measurement of outcomes and cost-effectiveness, and its focus on younger girls aged 11 to 15 years.

A rapid humanitarian analysis, drawing on existing CARE and external data and conducted in early 2025, provided additional insights into the contextual factors noted above. It highlighted that patriarchal norms continue to drive early and forced marriage, limit girls' education, and restrict livelihood opportunities. At the same time, women involved in savings groups and program activities were more likely to support girls' education, and female-headed households, often due to male migration, demonstrated different patterns of decision-making. Community leaders, religious figures, and school authorities influenced fathers and male household heads. Girls expressed aspirations beyond the home and preferred smaller families to the national average. These findings highlight both the challenges girls face and the potential for community-based interventions to expand their opportunities and free will.

[9] UNESCO (January 2024). Niger: Education Country Brief. Niger: Education Country Brief | International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (unesco.org)
[10] Table 34 in the République du Niger (2023). Statistiques de L'Education et de L'Alphabetisation Annuaire 2022-2023. https://www.stat-niger.org/wp content/uploads/publication_sectorielle/annuaire/MEN/ANNUAIRE_MEN_2022_2023_Valide.pdf

Project Overview

Re-IMAGINE aims to adapt and evaluate a set of interventions that will significantly delay the age of marriage for adolescent girls in a complex context such as Zinder, Niger. The program design is based on lessons learned from the "IMAGINE" project implemented by CARE in Niger (2016-2022), the "Pathways" program of the Girls' Education Centre (GCE) in northern Nigeria, and CARE's global experiences in the areas of CEFMU, adolescent education and empowerment, health, and justice for women and girls. The Re-IMAGINE program targets unmarried, out-of-school girls aged 11 to 15 years who have not yet given birth and will work in partnership with their families and communities to support positive changes grounded in equal decision-making, expanded opportunities, and body autonomy.

Within Re-IMAGINE, the project will test the effectiveness of different approaches for delaying marriage and first pregnancy using a cluster-randomized controlled trial (cRCT). **All 4,500 girls** across 76 intervention villages participating in Re-IMAGINE interventions, aligned with CGE's Pathways model, will receive a **standard package** of interventions which include:

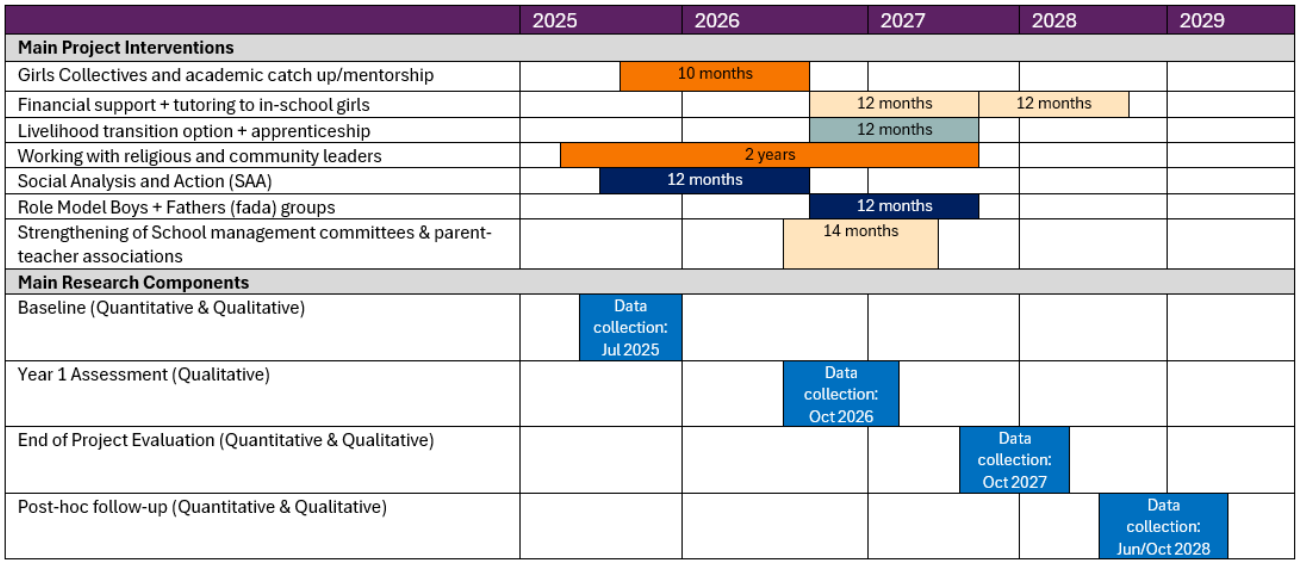
- 10 months of programming in girls' collectives
- Engagement with religious and community leaders in the 76 intervention villages
- Engagement of school management committees and parent-teacher associations in the 76 intervention villages (to be initiated mid-2026)
- Support for formal primary schooling (through financial assistance for schooling-related costs and additional tutoring) as the default pathway, OR livelihoods training as the alternate pathway

In addition to the standard package, half of the intervention villages (38 villages) will receive **social norms interventions** including:

- Social analysis and action, facilitated dialogues with parents, community and religious leaders and girls to reflect on norms shifting and action planning to begin in late 2025; role model boys, groups of boys adjacent to schools in program communities to support girls transitioning back to school to begin in late 2026; and fathers' groups, facilitated dialogues to leverage male power holders as allies to begin in late 2026 to test the relative contribution of these interventions on delaying marriage and first pregnancy

Figure 1 below shows the sequencing of the planned Re-IMAGINE interventions to align with girls' return to schooling or livelihoods training following 10 months of academic catch-up programming.

Figure 1. Sequencing of Re-IMAGINE interventions over the course of the program (2025-2029)



To test the contribution of extended schooling support on delaying marriage, half of the girls who transition to formal primary school will receive only one year of financial support for schooling expenses (subgroups 1a and 2a), while half of the girls who transition to formal primary school will receive two years of financial support for schooling expenses (subgroups 3a, 4a).

In **Table 1** below, we show the planned intervention groups for the 4,500 girls participating in Re-IMAGINE, by intervention component. While we have estimated the number of girls who may choose the default schooling pathway and the number of girls who may choose the alternative livelihoods pathway, the actual numbers of girls in each group will vary depending on the choices made by girls to either return to school or engage in livelihoods training following the 10 months of academic catch up programming that all girls will receive.

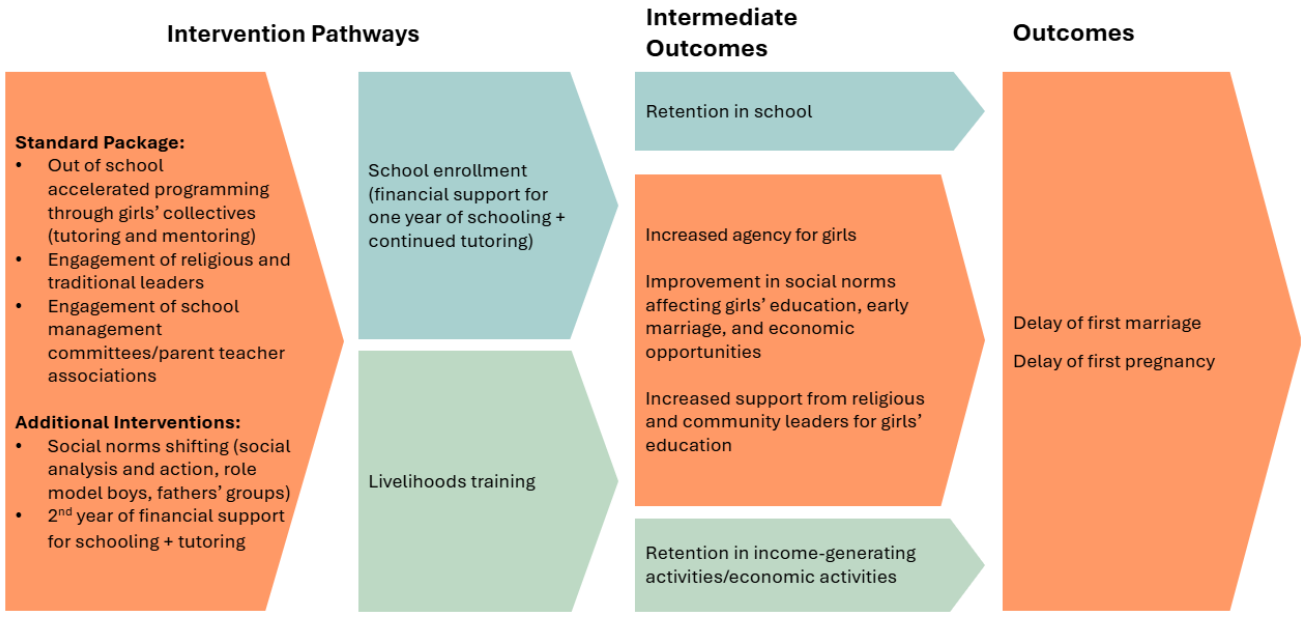
Table 1. Intervention Groups for Girls Participating in Re-IMAGINE Program

Intervention Groups	# of girls in each group* (4,500 girls total across these groups)	10-month girls collective (Girls' Y1)	Engagement with community and religious leaders (Girls' Y1)	Engaging school committees and parent associations for child protection	School financial support for 1 year + continued tutoring (Girls' Y2)	School financial support for a 2nd year (Girls Y3)	Livelihood pathway (Girls' Y2)	Additional social norms interventions (SAA for parents, leaders, and girls, fathers' groups, and role model boys)
Group 1a	597	x	x	x	x			
Group 1b	597	x	x	x			x	
Group 2a	591	x	x	x	x			x
Group 2b	591	x	x	x			x	x
Group 3a	627	x	x	x	x	x		
Group 3b	626	x	x	x			x	
Group 4a	530	x	x	x	x	x		x
Group 4b	529	x	x	x			x	x

*These are estimated numbers; actual numbers will vary, and splits within communities into a and b will be determined by girls' choices.

To address the primary outcomes of delaying marriage and first pregnancy, the Re-IMAGINE program will implement interventions at the community, school, household, and girls' group level per the following diagram:

Figure 2. Re-IMAGINE Theory of Change



Key Objectives of the Baseline Study

The RCT seeks to answer the following primary research question: What are the results of the Re-IMAGINE program on the primary outcomes of delay of marriage and delay of first pregnancy, and the intermediate outcomes of transition back to and retention in primary or secondary school, compared to a control?

In addition to quantitative outcomes, the project explores several guiding qualitative research questions, with the baseline analysis focusing on the first three:

1. What are the social norms that govern adolescent girls' educational attainment and marriage in Re-IMAGINE intervention communities?
2. What are the reference groups that reinforce them?
3. What are the norms held and enforced by religious and other leaders? Do/How do they use their influence to shift norms and support girls' education?
4. What is the additive influence of the intervention components designed to foster an enabling normative environment for adolescent girls' education?

The baseline study serves as a critical, foundational step in assessing the overall results of Re-IMAGINE interventions. Specifically, it aims to:

- Describe the pre-intervention conditions and contextual factors influencing CEFMU and girls' education in the program areas of Zinder, Niger
- Establish baseline benchmarks for participating communities to measure the changes and outcomes resulting from the program interventions
- Inform program design to support effective targeting, tailoring, and adaptation of interventions.
- Compare quantitative baseline findings with CGE's Pathways to Choice baseline findings to inform adaptation, contextualization, and comparability and differences in evidence generated to delay marriage

Outline of the Report

This report includes baseline findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. **Chapter 2** presents the methodology, detailing the study design, data collection methods, and the process and timeline for each component. It also explains the analytical approaches used to interpret the data. **Chapter 3** details the results, beginning with the quantitative findings, followed by insights from the qualitative research. **Chapter 4** explores factors relevant to community, school, and household interventions, as well as those specific to girls' groups. This chapter also touches upon the study's strengths and limitations. Finally, **Chapter 5** offers programmatic recommendations derived from the baseline findings to strengthen program interventions.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Quantitative survey

Quantitative Study Design: Site Selection, Sampling, Selection Criteria

Guided by the research objectives, a census-based sampling process was undertaken to identify eligible study sites in Zinder. CARE Niger selected the 90 villages that were to comprise the quantitative study sites from a list of 150 villages in Zinder, based on two criteria:

- Filter 1: Removing villages with fewer than 25 or more than 37 eligible girls for cost-effectiveness.
- Filter 2: Removing villages that are 30 minutes or more walking distance from the nearest paved road.

The quantitative study began with a census survey (hereinafter, "census"), conducted by CARE Niger and SongES. Through a combination of home visits and village consultations, the census identified and recorded the names and ages of all known program-eligible girls (based on the 3 eligibility criteria: 1. Aged 11-15; 2. Out of school; 3. Never married or had a child), names of their parents, and the names and roles of 6 leaders in each of the 90 villages.

Using census data compiled by CARE in Niger, the UW team randomly selected 50% of the girls in all 90 selected villages for the primary sample and 40% for the replacement sample for the baseline survey, using a software algorithm. In each village, the replacement sample was randomly ordered so that each girl was assigned a random position in the sequence. Among the girls selected for either the primary or replacement sample, the UW team randomly selected half to have one parent interviewed for the parents' survey. To achieve a balance between sexes among the interviewed parents, the randomizing algorithm was used to determine, with equal likelihood, whether the parent was the mother or the father. All leaders identified in the census are included in the baseline sample. The sampling strategy requires girls in the primary sample who are found to be ineligible or unavailable to be replaced by another girl from the same age group (11-13, or 14-15) in the replacement sample in the village, following the replacement order they are assigned. The objective is to survey half of all girls in the selected villages (the size of the primary sample) in a random manner. If a girl is interviewed and is parent-survey-tagged, regardless of whether she is from the primary or replacement sample, the selected parent should be interviewed; if a sampled girl cannot be reached, is found ineligible, or does not give consent, the sampling strategy requires the parent-survey tag to be nullified.

During the baseline survey, CARE and GRADE Africa found 7 villages from the 90 selected villages to be unsuitable for program implementation based on field findings in these villages. In response, the UW team and CARE chose 12 other villages from the initial list of 150 villages to replace these 7 villages in the sample, while maintaining roughly the same total number of girls. The same random sampling process for girls and parents was repeated on these 12 villages, and the sample lists shared with GRADE Africa for additional data collection in these villages. The final sample consists of 2,985 girls in the primary sample, 1,507 parents in the primary sample, and 580 leaders, across 95 villages.

Quantitative Survey: Data collection and process

On June 11 and June 17, 2025, the UW team provided two training sessions to GRADE Africa team leaders, during which the UW team demonstrated correct and incorrect ways of using the SurveyCTO data collection app, replacing girls, filling in data for select questions, and answered questions from GRADE Africa. The UW team also created and provided to GRADE Africa a survey guide containing information on ethics, protocol,

and best practices for data collection, which is included in **Appendix V**. Hints were built into the programmed survey to guide enumerators and standardize understanding of concepts across them, and the questionnaire included checks prohibiting impossible values in many questions.

It was made clear during training and in the survey guide that parents' surveys were conducted after girls' surveys, so that only parents of girls who were found eligible and themselves successfully surveyed were interviewed. During piloting, which took place in an unselected village in Zinder July 1-3, GRADE Africa continued to identify improvements needed to the instruments and the programmed survey, such as controls on values entered, and answer options, and worked with the UW team to finetune instruments up until field survey started. For example, a "banco" option was added to the question on house roof material, upon GRADE Africa's suggestion that this is a common roofing material used in Zinder. The final quantitative survey tools are available in **Appendix IV**. The programmed survey contained standardized French and Hausa versions of each question and answer option. Over 99 percent of all interviews were conducted in Hausa, the remaining mostly in French.

As the parents' survey intended to interview actual guardians of the girls and not necessarily biological mothers/fathers, it was made clear to GRADE Africa that if the two are not the same, the enumerator should attempt to interview the actual guardians even if these deviate from the parents recorded during census. In the final data, about 4 percent of the parents interviewed are non-biological parents.

Field survey started on July 14 and ended on September 15, 2025. The data collection was done through the SurveyCTO mobile app and split between GRADE Africa teams which worked in different villages simultaneously. In total, 3,396 complete girls' surveys, 1,456 complete parents' surveys and 570 complete leaders' surveys were collected from all 105 villages where data collection took place. The average upload rate was 57 girls' surveys per day, 24 parents' surveys per day and 10 leaders' surveys per day. As shown in **Table 2**, 3,036 complete girls' surveys, 1,324 complete parents' surveys and 525 complete leaders' surveys were collected from the final 95 villages.

Table 2. Quantitative Surveys Completed by Geography

Commune	Villages	Girls	Parents- Fathers	Parents- Mothers	Leaders
Dogo	43	1,292	278	311	235
Droum	26	734	184	171	142
Koleram	7	382	56	86	42
Mirriah	19	627	110	128	106

Qualitative Assessment

Qualitative Design, Selection and Sampling

In alignment with the research questions, a cross-sectional social norms assessment was conducted to explore social norms, attitudes, and behaviors among out-of-school adolescent girls and key reference groups in two communities, Gada and Tchalliga. These communities were randomly selected among a list of large and medium-sized villages that would later be engaged in Re-IMAGINE program activities.

Rapid, individual interviews among out-of-school girls and parents were conducted in each community to identify reference groups who influence girls' behaviors related to school retention, leaving, and returning to school, as well as those involved in decisions related to girls' marriage. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) with out-of-school girls, mothers, fathers, and leaders were also conducted in each community to identify the root causes of educational attainment and early marriage, with a focus on normative causes and related positive and negative sanctions (see **Appendix VII** for all qualitative data collection tools). Initial

contact with these communities was made by team members from CARE and GRADE Africa, who informed local officials as well as administrative and customary authorities about the study.

CARE provided an initial list of potential participants who met the eligibility criteria, which was used by GRADE Africa to invite participants in accordance with ethical principles and informed consent procedures. This approach ensured the recruitment of the planned number of participants matching the agreed-upon characteristics, while fostering trust and respect in these communities. In total, 22 rapid individual interviews and 16 FGDs, each with 6–7 participants, were conducted. **Table 3** summarizes the number of rapid interviews and FGDs conducted, by participant type and village.

Table 3. Qualitative Interviews Conducted by Geography

		Village 1 (Tchalliga)	Village 2 (Gada)	Total
		Activity (Participants)	Activity (Participants)	
Individual Interviews	Out-of-School Girls	5	5	10
	Mothers	3	3	6
	Fathers	3	3	6
	Total			**22**
Focus Group Discussions	Out-of-School Girls	2 (7+6)	2 (7+6)	4 (26)
	Mothers	2 (7+6)	2 (7+6)	4 (26)
	Fathers	2 (6+6)	2 (6+6)	4 (24)
	Religious & Community Leaders	2 (6+6)	2 (6+6)	4 (24)
	Total			**16 (100)**

Qualitative Data Collection and Process

On June 24–25, 2025, the UCSD team convened a two-day virtual Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop with GRADE Africa to introduce foundational concepts on social norms and strengthen participants' capacity to apply them in practice. The workshop combined conceptual sessions with group-based exercises to identify social norms, attitudes, and behaviors; provided opportunities to review and refine data-collection tools; and facilitated the development of joint work plans for subsequent phases of the study, including pilot testing, data collection, and analysis. The training for qualitative research assistants, led by GRADE Africa, was later held in Niger from July 5–11, 2025. It covered a broad range of topics, including an introduction to the Re-IMAGINE program and research study, review of data collection tools in French and Hausa with practical exercises and role-plays, ethical principles and data collection protocols, as well as monitoring and quality assurance procedures. Training participants also learned key concepts related to social norms—including descriptive and injunctive norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors—and practiced identifying these through case studies. Additionally, training sessions focused on harmonizing data collection tools in Hausa to ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy, while practical interview simulations with out-of-school girls, parents, and leaders strengthened participants' interviewing, note-taking, and dialect awareness skills. Following pre-testing, GRADE Africa and UCSD convened a collective review and feedback session to further refine the data collection tools, harmonize terminology, and reinforce safety protocols, logistics, supervision procedures, and practical steps for transcription and data recording.

Qualitative data collection started on July 21, 2025, and ended on August 18, 2025. Four research assistants conducted all rapid interviews and FGDs in Hausa, then transcribed them into French. Each rapid interview was conducted by one research assistant and lasted an average of 20 minutes, whereas each FGD was led by a pair of research assistants (a facilitator and a note-taker) and lasted an average of 2 hours and 30

minutes. Observations of interviews by the GRADE Africa supervision team helped ensure confidentiality, appropriate choice of interview locations, and clarity of questioning. Quality control was maintained by the GRADE Africa and UCSD supervision teams through close, ongoing monitoring of research assistants' transcripts, field notes, and other data collection outputs. Regular team meetings and debriefs led by GRADE Africa and UCSD were also held to identify and address challenges, provide technical support, and discuss emerging themes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

As soon as data collection commenced, the UW team began high-frequency checks of the uploaded data as it came in and sent issues found to GRADE Africa at least weekly. The high-frequency checks included, on each variable, percentages of "don't know", "refused", and "other" answers, the minimum numeric response, the 5th, 10th, 25th, 50th, 95th, and 99th percentiles, the maximum numeric response, and the mean value, as well as unsurveyed rates and enumerator statistics.

In addition to the high-frequency checks, the UW team also conducted several checks on each survey to ensure the accuracy of reported IDs. First, the team checked for duplicated IDs within the girls', parents', and leaders' surveys. Second, the UW team looked for duplicates among the girls' IDs in the parents' survey, with exceptions for girls whose mothers and fathers were both surveyed. Third, the UW team examined congruence between village IDs in the survey and the village component of girls', parents', and leaders' IDs recorded in their respective surveys, as well as between the village components of parents' and daughters' IDs recorded in the parents' survey. Additionally, the UW team looked for ID consistency across surveys, particularly whether girls' names matched where recorded in the census, girls' survey, and parents' survey.

In all cases where there were questions about data validity or ID issues, they were referred to GRADE Africa. The UW team received corrections from GRADE Africa, implemented them on the cleaned data, then sent back any further questions (such as newly created duplicates) for additional clarifications and corrections.

Results from the scales included in the baseline surveys are presented in several ways. For comparison purposes, the general self-efficacy scale (GSE) is summed across the items, where a response of "Not at all true" is 1 point, "Hardly true" is 2 points, "Moderately true" is 3 points, and "Exactly true" is 4 points. The maximum score on the ten-item scale is 40 points.

For balance checks, opinion questions, and scales are combined using z-scores. Each item in the scale is transformed into a z-score by first demeaning it relative to the control group and then dividing by the control-group standard deviation. We then take the mean across all items in the index, treating non-respondents as missing and omitting them from both the numerator and the denominator. The final index is then again transformed into a z-score so that it is interpretable in standard deviation units.

At many points in the survey, questions were filtered using skip logic to prevent inappropriate or nonsensical questions from being asked of the respondent. For example, a respondent might be asked if they had ever attended school. If they said no, they would then not be asked how many years of schooling they had completed. For analytical purposes, where sensible, we have backfilled such responses (so that, in the example above, the response to years of schooling would be coded as zero). This was not done in cases where the question simply did not apply to the respondent; for example, no response would be recorded on a question about why a girl had left school if the girl had never attended school.

For several questions, particularly those about why a girl had left or never attended school, other specified options were widely used. For example, of the 1,248 girls who answered the question about why they had left school, 283 provided an answer considered outside the prespecified list by the surveyor, either instead of or in addition to an item on the list. In these cases, the enumerator entered the response. After completing the survey, the UW team reviewed these responses with CARE's assistance and either coded them as one of the existing options in the survey or assigned them a new numeric code.

No data or respondents in communities that are part of the Re-IMAGINE study are omitted from the analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Teams from UCSD and GRADE Africa collaboratively conducted data analyses based on a co-developed data analysis plan.

For the rapid, individual interview data, teams reviewed interview forms and recorded the most frequently mentioned types of influential people in twelve (12) summary tables. For each participant type and village, two tables were generated: one capturing the key reference groups influencing girls' decision to leave school or not attend, and another detailing the reference groups associated with girls' marriage. Meanwhile, all FGD transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative software Dedoose. An initial codebook was developed using a deductive approach and subsequently expanded to capture data-driven codes. During consensus coding, any discrepancies in code application between and among UCSD and GRADE Africa teams were resolved through weekly meetings, resulting in a finalized codebook and agreed-upon coding strategies (see **Appendix VIII** for the final version of the codebook). The remaining transcripts were then coded accordingly. Key themes from the FGDs were identified by generating code queries and developing a series of synthesis tables that captured social norms, rewards and sanctions, exceptions to norms, non-normative factors, and 'other' results to inform program design and implementation, as well as future research/evaluation efforts. Finally, teams compared these findings across participant groups and against the social norms results of the quantitative survey.

Ethical considerations

Data collection and management followed the terms of the research protocols, which emphasized confidentiality and informed consent, and were developed in consultation with Niger, the University of Washington, and the University of California, San Diego's Ethics Committees. The research protocols were submitted and validated by the National Ethics Committee of Niger, as well as the University of Washington and the University of California, San Diego.

During data collection, UW, UCSD, and GRADE Africa agreed to deploy same-sex enumerators for girls' and mothers' surveys, as well as for qualitative interviews and FGDs. Consent or assent, as appropriate, was collected before every survey, interview, or FGD.

Chapter 3: Results

Quantitative Results

In this section, we discuss the basic demographic and socioeconomic profiles of girls, parents, and leaders, drawing on the quantitative baseline survey and providing descriptive analysis to shed further light on the populations that Re-IMAGINE will serve. Detailed tables with summary statistics for every question in the community census, girls survey, parents survey, and leaders survey are available in **Appendix I, subsections I.A, I.B, I.D and I.F.**

Selected statistics from the girls' baseline are presented in **Table 4**. The average girl in the baseline survey was **13.1 years old** (34% were younger than 13, 26% were 13, and 40% were older than 13). Only 41% of the sample had ever attended school, and the average girl had completed 1.8 years of schooling (corresponding to roughly 4.3 years for the average girl who had ever attended). About 24% of the sample reported that they can read and write, and 19% reported that their mothers can read or write. Sight, hearing, and mobility issues were rare; 3.9% of the sample selected an option other than "no difficulty" for at least one of the three. The precise breakdown is available in **Appendix Table IB.3**.

Girls reported strong aspirations for education; 70% said that if they were the only ones deciding, they would be in school now. 44% of girls said that, if they were able to attend school, they would want to complete senior secondary or higher. Girls worked at high rates; 56% of the sample had worked outside of the home in the last year. Only 26% of girls had at least some control over their own earnings. Almost 30% of respondents report having some savings.

Table 4. Girls Survey Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Sample
Age (years)	13.125	1.300	3036
Ever been to school (d)	0.411	0.492	3036
Years of schooling	1.774	2.521	3035
Can read and write (d)	0.235	0.424	3034
Mother reads or writes (d)	0.187	0.390	2995
Sight, hearing or mobility issue (d)	0.039	0.193	3035
Would choose to attend school (d)	0.703	0.457	3013
Would like to complete senior secondary or higher (d)	0.445	0.497	2508
Worked last year (d)	0.564	0.496	3035
Controls own earnings (d)	0.259	0.438	3207
Respondent saves money (d)	0.296	0.456	3035
Girl's ideal marriage age	16.675	1.927	2986
Ideal age of husband	21.184	3.799	2954
Any involvement in own healthcare (d)	0.531	0.499	3025
Number of female friends	5.079	3.445	3034
Can attend training course alone (d)	0.618	0.486	2868
Can attend health facility alone (d)	0.199	0.399	3004
Self-efficacy scale (sum)	24.998	14.359	2997
Most girls in community complete primary school:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.627	0.484	2999

Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.107	0.310	2999
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.266	0.442	2999
Community approves of girl completing primary:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.701	0.458	2985
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.113	0.316	2985
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.187	0.390	2985
Most girls in community marry before 16:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.828	0.377	2999
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.059	0.236	2999
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.112	0.316	2999
Community approves of girl marrying before 16:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.808	0.394	2991
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.070	0.255	2991
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.122	0.327	2991
Nafisa would get in trouble with her parents (d)	0.746	0.435	3006

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE girls baseline survey. For each specified variable, Mean contains the mean value, SD contains the standard deviation, and Sample contains the number of girls who answered the question. For continuous variables, min contains the minimum value of the variable, and max contains the max value of the variable. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

Girls said their ideal marriage age was roughly 16.7 years, and their ideal husband's age was 21.2 years. 53% of girls reported at least some involvement in decisions about their own healthcare. The average girl had 5 friends. Movement restrictions are common, particularly outside of a girl's own village; **62% of girls said they could attend a training course alone**, and 20% said they could go to a health center alone. On the self-efficacy scale, a 40-point measure of one's belief in one's own effectiveness, the average girl scored 25 points.

The last items in the table indicate responses to select social norms questions. There was meaningful variation in response to all these questions. On average, girls tended to strongly agree or agree that most girls in the community complete primary school, and that the community approves of girls completing primary school. At even higher rates, they strongly agreed or agreed that most girls marry before 16, and that the community approves of girls marrying before 16. The last question comes from a vignette posed to the girls about a hypothetical 14-year-old girl named Nafisa, whose parents are considering her marriage. Girls overwhelmingly agreed that Nafisa would get into trouble for speaking up about not yet wanting to marry.

Table 5 presents additional information on the answers girls gave when asked about why they dropped out of school or, if they had never attended, why they never attended. Girls were asked only one of these questions, depending on how they had answered a question about whether they had ever attended school. Only responses given by at least 5% of girls appear in this table. Fuller lists, containing both the lists of reasons girls gave and all answer options for both lists, are in **Appendix Table I.B12** and **Appendix Table I.B13**.

Table 5. Girls' Reasons for School Drop Out and Non-Attendance

Variable	Mean	SD	Sample
Most important reason for stopping:			
Work at home or outside (d)	0.266	0.442	1165
Illness, injury or travel (d)	0.112	0.316	1165
Did not want to attend (d)	0.334	0.472	1165
Family did not allow (d)	0.069	0.253	1165
Lack of academic progress (d)	0.135	0.342	1165
Most important reason for not attending:			
Work at home or outside (d)	0.131	0.338	1600
School was not available (d)	0.051	0.221	1600
Family did not allow (d)	0.739	0.439	1600

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE girls baseline survey, specifically responses given by at least 5% of girls for questions about the girl's main reason for stopping or never attending schools. For each specified variable, Mean contains the Mean value, SD contains the standard deviation, and Sample contains the number of girls who answered the question. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

When talking about leaving school, the most common reason girls gave was not wanting to attend (33%), though in some cases they attributed this specifically to the influence of their friends or to corporal punishment by teachers. Another 27% of girls said they stopped because they needed to work at home or outside. 13% of girls stopped due to lack of academic progress, either the need to repeat grades or failure on exams that determined passage to the next level of school. Over 11% of girls cited illness, injury, or long travel (often to another country or with their parents) as the reason they dropped out. Seven percent of girls attributed their dropout to their family not allowing them to attend.

Among girls who had never attended school, however, their families' refusal to allow them to attend was overwhelmingly the most common reason, given by 74% of girls; parents indicated that girls' schooling was not important. Girls also cited the need to work at home or outside (13%) or a lack of available schools during their younger years (5%) as reasons why they never attended school.

Table 6 presents selected statistics from the parents' survey, including the overall mean, the mean and sample for mothers, and the mean and sample for fathers. The average mother was 40 years old, and the average father was 49 years old. 40% of mothers could read and write, compared to 61% of fathers. 13% of parents reported that their family has access to electricity, and the average family has 6.3 children. As part of the household survey, parents were asked to provide a detailed roster of their children, which was used to construct family-level statistics. Seventeen percent of families reported that they had ever had a daughter attend junior secondary, the same share as those who had had a son attend; at senior secondary, however, 1% of families had ever had a daughter attend, as compared to 2% for boys.

Of daughters aged 13 to 17, 12% were married; of those aged 16 to 17, 53% were married. Parents also reported that 16 years old is the ideal age for girls to marry. When asked whom they would go to for guidance on their daughter's marriage, more than 90% of both mothers and fathers said they would turn to family members. 35% of mothers and 47% of fathers would go to friends, 13% of mothers and 28% of fathers would go to the imam, and 14.5% of each would go to village leaders. For more on givers of advice, see **Appendix Table I.D16**.

Table 6. Parents Survey Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Mothers	Sample	Fathers	Sample
Can read and write (d)	0.351	0.114	695	0.613	628
Has electricity (d)	0.128	0.126	696	0.131	627
Number of children	6.264	6.266	696	6.263	628
Any daughter ever in junior secondary (d)	0.167	0.161	696	0.174	627
Any son ever in junior secondary (d)	0.169	0.151	696	0.188	627
Any daughter ever in senior secondary (d)	0.009	0.011	696	0.006	627
Any son ever in senior secondary (d)	0.018	0.023	696	0.013	627
Share girls 13 to 17 married	0.123	0.139	538	0.103	442
Share girls 16 to 17 married	0.534	0.550	142	0.514	110
Age (years)	43.98	39.56	696	48.87	628
Ideal age for girl to marry	15.96	15.79	696	16.14	626
Would go to for advice on daughter's marriage:					
Village chief (d)	0.145	0.145	696	0.145	628
Imam (d)	0.201	0.126	696	0.283	628
Family (d)	0.951	0.937	696	0.967	628
Friends (d)	0.407	0.349	696	0.471	628

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE parents baseline survey. For each specified variable, Mean contains the mean value, SD contains the standard deviation, and Sample contains the number of parents who answered the question. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

Table 7 presents responses from the parents' survey, specifically the section where parents answered questions about individual daughters; thus, parents with multiple Re-IMAGINE-eligible daughters answered the section multiple times.

Overall, parents' answers seem more aligned with, or even more positive towards, education than those of their daughters. 79% of parents answered that going to school would be good for their daughter. 53% said that in an ideal world, she would complete senior secondary or above, 9 percentage points higher than the 44% of girls who said they would like to complete such levels of school.

On average, parents said their daughter would marry at 16.4 years, slightly before the age they think she would like to marry (16.6 years). At least in terms of averages, these align well with girls, who said their ideal marriage age was 16.7 years.

Despite the congruence on these topics, only 23% of girls had been talked to by their parents about their lives in the last year, and only 22% had involved their daughters in decisions about their lives in the past year.

Table 7. Parents' Answers on Girls' Summary Statistics

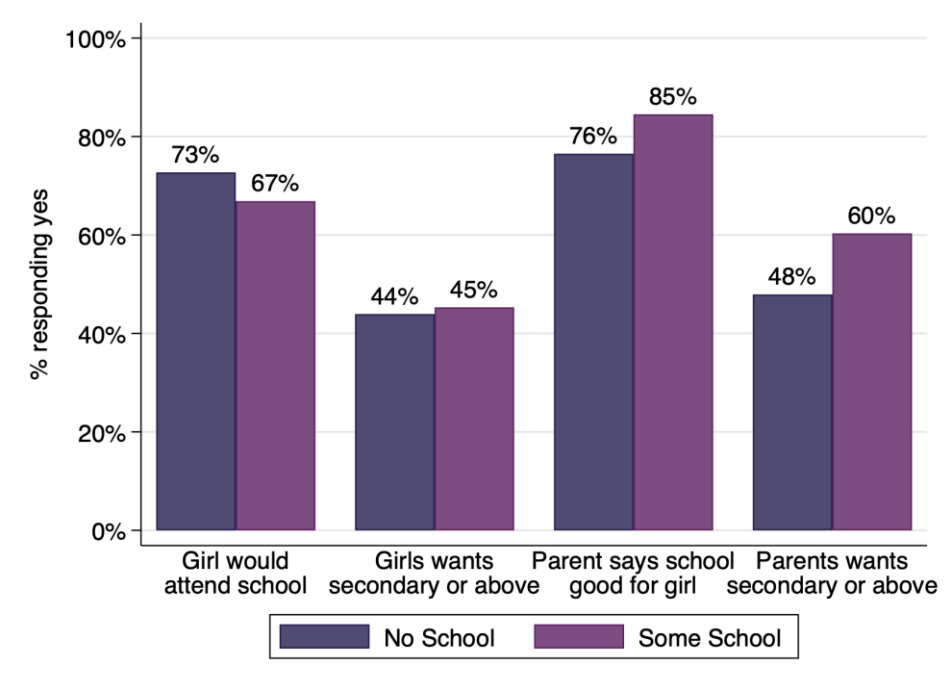
Variable	Mean	SD	Sample
Going to school would be good for daughter (d)	0.792	0.406	1432
Ideally, daughter completes senior secondary or higher (d)	0.526	0.499	1248
Age daughter will marry	16.395	1.687	1416
Age daughter would like to marry	16.613	2.068	1294
Talked to daughter about her life last year (d)	0.233	0.423	1439
Involved in decisions about her life last year (d)	0.215	0.411	1440

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE parents baseline survey. For each specified variable, Mean contains the mean value, SD contains the standard deviation, and Sample contains the number of parents who answered the question. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

We also examine whether girls who have attended school differ in their interest in returning to school, and whether parents have different expectations for their schooling. The results are presented in **Figure 3** below.

We find that among girls, those who have had some schoolings are slightly less likely to say they would attend if they alone could choose and are very slightly more likely to want to complete secondary or higher education. Parents, on the other hand, are more likely to say going to school would be good for their daughter if she had previously attended, and much more likely to say she would ideally complete secondary school or higher if she had ever attended school. One potential explanation is that girls who have been to school are more pessimistic (or more realistic) about their challenges, yet their parents still view them as a better fit for formal education.

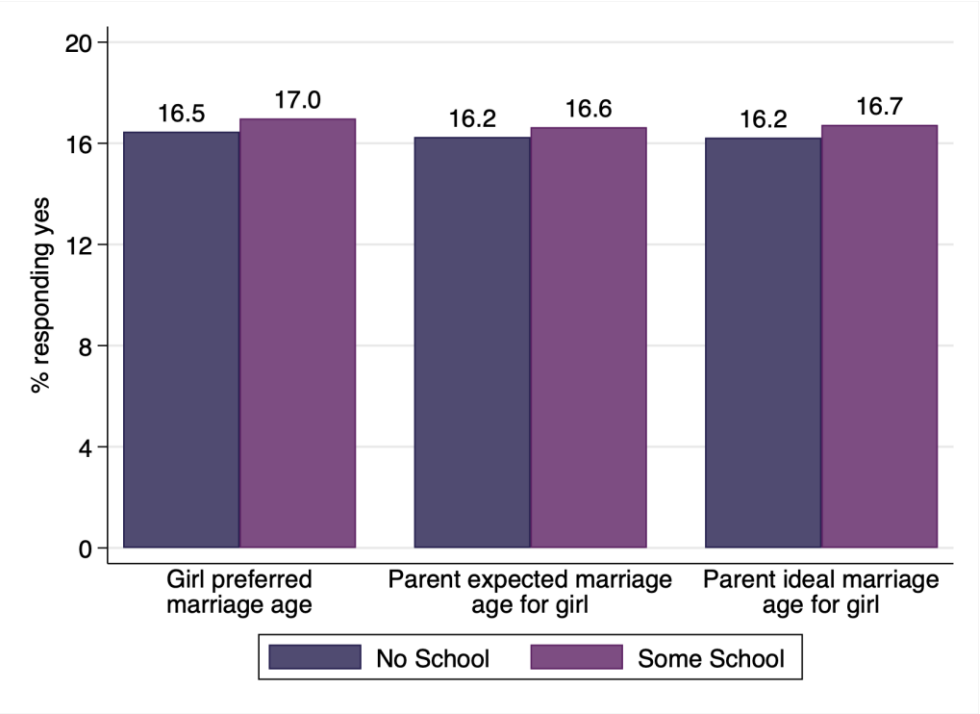
Figure 3. Girl and Parent Aspirations by School History



We also see small differences in expectations about marriage age based on whether a girl has attended school, as shown in **Figure 4**. If a girl has ever attended school, she would prefer to marry slightly later; her parents expect a slightly later marriage for her, and they say the ideal marriage age for her would be slightly

later. However, girls who have ever attended school are slightly older than those who have not—by more than half a year, which is larger than the difference in expected marriage ages.

Figure 4. Girl and Parent Ideal Marriage Age for Girls by School History



Appendix Table I.C2 contains more comparisons for girls based on whether they have ever been to school, and **Appendix Table I.E1** contains more comparisons in parents' responses based on whether their daughter has ever been to school. Another difference we find is that girls who have ever been to school score roughly 2.3 points higher on the GSE. **Appendix Table I.C1** compares girls aged 11, 12, and 13 with those aged 14 and 15. We find that younger girls score lower on the GSE by nearly four points. **Appendix Table I.C3** also presents comparisons based on whether the girl had an above- or below-median GSE score. We find that girls with above-median scores would like to marry roughly 0.3 years later than those with below-median scores.

One complication for all these comparisons is that the groups overlap; as above, girls who have been to school are, on average, older and have higher GSE scores. Nonetheless, these comparisons help us understand how some survey responses fit together.

Table 8 contains selected statistics from the leaders' survey. 31% of the leaders surveyed were female, and the remaining 69% were male. The average leader was **49 years old**. 30% had ever been to school, and 34% of leaders had at least one Re-IMAGINE eligible daughter.

Leaders were asked about the advice they give to community members. 37% said that they had given advice to a parent on marrying off a daughter under 16 years old; the average leader had given such advice to 2.4 people. When asked about the last person they gave advice to, 73% answered that they had advised against organizing the marriage.

On average, leaders said the ideal age for girls to marry is 16. When asked what advice they would give to the father of Nafisa, the hypothetical 14-year-old in our vignette, only 12% of leaders said that they would advise marriage.

Table 8. Leaders Survey Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Sample
Female leader surveyed (d)	0.307	0.462	525
Age (years)	49.211	12.842	525
Ever been to school (d)	0.301	0.459	525
Has Re-IMAGINE eligible daughter (d)	0.343	0.475	525
Gave advice on marrying girl under 16 last year (d)	0.371	0.484	515
Number given marriage advice in last year	2.408	6.319	505
Advice given to last person:			
Organize the marriage (d)	0.265	0.442	185
Do not organize the marriage (d)	0.730	0.445	185
Could not advise (d)	0.005	0.074	185
Ideal age for girl to marry	16.257	1.702	525
Would advise marriage for Nafisa (d)	0.118	0.323	525

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE leaders baseline survey for Main variables. For each specified variable, Mean contains the mean value, SD contains the standard deviation, and Sample contains the number of parents who answered the question. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

As part of the baseline survey, identical questions on norms were asked to girls, parents, and leaders, and the same vignette was presented to all three groups. In **Table 9,** we directly compare responses across the same questions from these different populations on select indicators. **Appendix II** has more detailed comparisons, including all norms and all vignette questions, in **Appendix Tables II.A1**, **II.A2**, and **II.A3.**

Responses are reasonably similar between girls, parents, and leaders on education norms. Leaders are most likely to strongly agree or agree that most girls complete primary school, followed by mothers and fathers, and then girls, though parents and girls responded very similarly overall. Fathers are most likely to strongly agree or agree that the community approves of girls completing primary school, followed closely by leaders; girls are slightly less likely to agree, followed closely by mothers. However, girls are more likely than any other population to strongly disagree or disagree with this statement.

On marriage, divergences are much wider. 83% of girls strongly agree or agree that most girls in the community marry before age 16, and 81% strongly agree or agree that the community approves of a girl marrying before 16. Their mothers share similar attitudes (80% and 76%). Fathers and leaders, however, do not; only 64% and 57%, respectively, strongly agree or agree that most girls in the community marry before 16, and only 61% and 56% strongly agree or agree that the community approves of a girl marrying before 16.

When it comes to sanctions, however, agreement is much more widespread – between 70% and 75% of girls, mothers, fathers, and leaders agree that the hypothetical 14-year-old Nafisa would be in trouble with her parents for expressing her desire not to marry yet.

Table 9. Comparison of Selected Responses on Social Norms across Surveys

Variable	Girls	Mothers	Fathers	Leaders
Most girls in community complete primary school:				
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.627	0.645	0.633	0.737
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.107	0.122	0.067	0.071
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.266	0.233	0.300	0.192
Community approves of girl completing primary:				

Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.701	0.690	0.769	0.755
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.113	0.137	0.061	0.109
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.187	0.172	0.170	0.136
Most girls in community marry before 16:				
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.828	0.793	0.640	0.567
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.059	0.079	0.104	0.107
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.112	0.128	0.257	0.326
Community approves of girl marrying before 16:				
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.808	0.755	0.614	0.555
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.070	0.098	0.112	0.132
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.122	0.147	0.274	0.313
Nafisa would get in trouble with her parents (d)	0.746	0.715	0.728	0.752

Notes: This table contains the summary statistics from the Re-IMAGINE baseline survey for Social Norms variables, compared between the girl's survey, parents survey and leaders survey. For each specified variable, Mean contains the mean value for the specific survey. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d).

One goal of this project is to test the replication of the Centre for Girls Education's Pathways program, adapted to the local context in the Zinder region of Niger. To enable these comparisons, the large extent of the girls' baseline survey questionnaire was identical across the two projects (or as identical as possible, given linguistic differences), and we present some comparisons in **Table 10**.

At baseline, **we find that the girls in the two regions - Kaduna, Nigeria, and Zinder, Niger - differ substantially**. The Re-IMAGINE population is slightly older (roughly 0.2 years, or 2.4 months); a deeper look at the distribution suggests that the largest age group is 13 in both programs, but Pathways has a larger share of 11-year-olds and Re-IMAGINE has a larger share of 15-year-olds.

The Pathways sample is considerably more educated than the Re-IMAGINE sample. 74% of Pathways study girls have been to school, as compared to only 41% of Re-IMAGINE study girls. Among those who have been to school in both regions, however, average attainment is not significantly different: girls have attended about 4.3 years of school. 47% of Pathways study girls report they can read and write, about twice as many as the 24% of Re-IMAGINE study girls who say the same. Mothers are significantly more literate in the Pathways sample: 54% of girls report that their mothers can read and write, compared with only 14% in the Re-IMAGINE sample.

Schooling aspirations are consistently higher in Pathways to Scale. Girls participating in the Pathways to Scale program are about 20% more likely to say they would attend school if they were the decision-maker, though a strong majority in both samples do want to be at school. 77% of Pathways study girls would like to attend senior secondary or above, as compared to only 44% of Re-IMAGINE study girls.

Pathways to Scale study girls are slightly more likely to have worked outside the home in the last 12 months than Re-IMAGINE study girls (62% vs. 56%). All girls, however, are equally likely to have a say in how they spend their earnings; just over a quarter of girls in either study make those decisions, whether independently or with another decision-maker. Pathways study girls are 9% more likely to save money.

The ideal marriage age is much higher for Pathways study girls than for Re-IMAGINE study girls: 18.6 years old, compared with 16.7 years old. The ideal age of husbands is more similar, with Pathways study girls reporting an average of 22.4 years old and Re-IMAGINE study girls reporting an average of 21.2 years old.

Girls in the Re-IMAGINE study have slightly more female friends – 5 as opposed to 4.5 in the Pathways study. Re-IMAGINE study girls also face slightly less strict movement restrictions; 62% can attend a training course alone, as compared to only 58% of Pathways girls. However, roughly 20% of girls in both studies say they could attend a health facility alone, with no meaningful differences between the populations.

On the self-efficacy scale—a 10-question measure of how the girl perceives her own efficacy—Pathways study girls score significantly higher—34 points versus 25 out of a total score of 40. We note that there was a small difference in implementation; the response order was deliberately reversed in Zinder to aid understanding. It is unlikely this change is the cause of the large difference between the two populations.

In the Re-IMAGINE study group, we observe lower agreement with the statement that most girls should complete primary school and with perceived community support for girls completing primary school. We also see higher rates of agreement with statements about girls marrying before 16 and perceived community support for girls marrying before 16. In our vignette, 62% of girls in the Pathways study group stated that 14-year-old Nafisa would get into trouble for speaking up about her desire not to marry, compared with 75% in the Re-IMAGINE study group.

Overall, despite the similarities in target populations, the results show that the girls Re-IMAGINE seeks to target differ from the girls Pathways seeks to target. These early-stage comparisons will help inform the implementation of both programs, particularly Re-IMAGINE, as it adapts to the Zinder context. We also note that the 2023-24 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey indicate a 20% reduction in early marriage among women under 18 over the past 7 years, suggesting shifts in Nigeria that may have contributed to the differences observed between the two populations.

Table 10. Comparison between Re-IMAGINE and Pathways

Variable	Re-IMAGINE mean	Pathways mean	P-value
Age (years)	13.125	12.938	0.000
Ever been to school (d)	0.411	0.740	0.000
Years of schooling	4.318	4.279	0.620
Can read and write (d)	0.235	0.476	0.000
Mother reads and writes (d)	0.138	0.540	0.000
Would choose to attend school (d)	0.703	0.901	0.000
Would like senior secondary or higher (d)	0.445	0.770	0.000
Worked last year (d)	0.564	0.622	0.000
Controls own earnings (d)	0.259	0.263	0.783
Respondent saves money (d)	0.296	0.384	0.000
Girl's ideal marriage age	16.675	18.657	0.000
Ideal age of husband	21.184	22.432	0.000
Number of female friends	5.079	4.533	0.000
Can attend training course alone (d)	0.618	0.577	0.002
Can attend health facility alone (d)	0.199	0.190	0.386
Self-efficacy scale (sum)	24.998	34.419	0.000
Most girls in community complete primary school:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.627	0.798	0.000
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.107	0.050	0.000
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.266	0.152	0.000

Community approves of girl completing primary:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.701	0.892	0.000
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.113	0.019	0.000
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.187	0.089	0.000
Most girls in community marry before 16:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.828	0.707	0.000
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.059	0.031	0.000
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.112	0.261	0.000
Community approves of girl marrying before 16:			
Strongly agree or agree (d)	0.808	0.657	0.000
Neither agree nor disagree (d)	0.070	0.035	0.000
Strongly disagree or disagree (d)	0.122	0.308	0.000
Nafisa would get in trouble with her parents (d)	0.746	0.618	0.000

Notes: This table compares summary statistics between Re-IMAGINE and Pathways. For each specified variable, mean contains the Mean value for the specific survey. Dummy variables, which take only the values 0 or 1, are indicated by (d). The highest possible score on the self-efficacy scale would be 40. A p-value of less than 0.05 indicates a two-way t-test rejects the null of equality between the two means.

Randomization and Balance

The quantitative component of the baseline study was also used to verify that randomization produced balanced groups for implementation and evaluation. Details on how the randomization was performed and the tests used to assess balance are presented in **Appendix III**. In this appendix, we also present detailed tables that verify the balance of outcomes from the community census (**Appendix Table III.A1**), girls' survey (**Appendix Table III.B1** and **III.B2**), parents' survey (**Appendix Table III.C1**, **III.C2**, and **III.C3**), and leaders' survey (**Appendix Table III.D1** and **III.D2**).

Overall, we conclude that the study is well-balanced, particularly for key girls' indicators. We do not see persistent differences across most groups and categories; where statistical imbalance does exist, it is generally not large. Such imbalances arise by random chance and, by their nature, would not be expected to prevent us from successfully evaluating the program.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative component of the baseline study was designed to identify the salient social norms related to girls' education and early marriage and to examine the social networks within which these norms are embedded.

Reference Groups and Social Networks

"My mother had just given birth and was overwhelmed with her responsibilities, so my grandmother suggested that I leave school to help my mother at home. Since then, I have not returned to school... Members of our family, both paternal and maternal, oppose my schooling and prefer that I stay at home to assist my mother with her daily tasks...I spend most of my time at home with my older brother, my grandmother, or my best friend, all of whom give me excellent advice."
– 11-year-old girl, ID#002, Gada, Rapid Interview

Reference groups are the people or groups whose opinions and behaviors matter most to an individual when deciding how to act. They are those whose approval, disapproval, or example influences whether someone conforms to or challenges a social norm. Effective efforts to promote positive norms, or shift harmful ones, must therefore address the influence of these groups. The quote above illustrates how pivotal they are in shaping decisions related to girls' education and marriage.

This section presents findings from 10 rapid interviews with out-of-school girls aged 11–15 years, as well as six rapid interviews with mothers and six with fathers. The purpose of the rapid interviews was to identify the individuals within respondents' social networks who most strongly influence their behaviors and decisions related to girls' education and marriage. During the interviews, girls were asked a series of questions to explore who they turn to for advice and support when deciding whether to leave school or not enroll, when to marry, whose opinions matter most in their community, and who they trust to discuss such matters with their parents. For mothers and fathers, questions explored who influences their own behaviors and decisions—such as whether to talk with their daughters about educational aspirations, whether to enroll or withdraw them from school, and how to respond to or consider marriage offers. Parents were also asked whose opinions they value most in these decisions and with whom they feel comfortable discussing them. Illustrative quotes from rapid interviews with girls and parents are in **Appendix IX.**

Girls' Reference Groups and Social Networks

Table 11 summarizes the frequency with which girls mentioned reference group members, along with additional insights from girls' and parents' interviews described below. Participants were not limited to the number or type of people they could name in response to these questions. Among the 10 adolescent girls who participated in the rapid interviews, eight had attended some level of schooling (most having completed *Cours Moyen 1 or Cours Moyen 2*, the last two years of primary school), while two had never been to school. Participants ranged from 11 to 14 years.

Table 11. Key Reference Groups Influencing Girls' Education and Marriage Decisions (According to Girls 11-14)

Reference Groups	Education	Marriage
Parents	10	4
Parents (not specified)	10	4
Mothers	2	1
Fathers	6	0
Siblings	7	4
Sisters	2	3
Brothers	5	2
Extended Family (grandparent, aunt/uncle, cousin)	8	5
Grandmothers	3	1
Grandfathers	0	0
Aunts	4	4
Uncles	5	3
Female cousins	0	2
Male cousins	1	0
Peers and friends	4	7
Neighbors	1	2
Leaders (school personnel, village elders, religious and community leaders)	7	5

School personnel (teachers, school principals, directors)	4	0
Village elders	1	2
Religious leaders (Imams, Marabouts, Sultans, etc.)	2	2
Community leaders (village chief, second to the village chief)	4	3

Note: When girls were asked questions about education and marriage, responses that mentioned only "parents" (without specifying "mother" or "father") were counted separately.

Results indicate that parents, siblings, and extended family members are girls' primary reference groups, playing central roles in their education-related social networks, with most of these core network members being male. All adolescent girls cited their parents as influential in education-related decisions; however, six of the ten specifically mentioned their fathers, while only two mentioned their mothers. Seven of the ten girls cited siblings, with half naming their brothers and only two naming their sisters as key members of their social networks. Extended family members—such as aunts and uncles—were also frequently described as important sources of advice and support. Among the seven girls who identified leaders within their core networks, four mentioned village chiefs (or deputy chiefs) as influential figures. Although four girls noted that teachers or school personnel had some influence on their educational decisions and behaviors, these actors were generally not perceived as key decision-makers. Teachers were often informed only after girls had already decided to leave school, and even when they offered advice to continue, their recommendations were commonly disregarded.

When asked about marriage, the composition of girls' social networks shifted notably. Seven of the ten girls mentioned friends or peers, five cited extended family members and community leaders, and four mentioned siblings, with women and girls featuring more prominently than men and boys. While mothers and fathers are involved in marriage-related behaviors and decisions, participants emphasized that it is uncommon for girls to discuss their preferred marriage partners or the timing of marriage directly with their parents. Instead, they typically seek advice and exchange information with peers, siblings, and trusted female elders. As girls' primary reference groups, older siblings and extended family members also often act as intermediaries when girls wish to involve their parents in these discussions. As one girl explained,

"It is my older sister who gives me advice on when girls should get married… It is my older sisters who advise me on how to talk to my parents about the person I want to marry."

— 13-year-old girl, ID#002, Tchalliga, Rapid Interview.

Finally, community and religious leaders may provide advice to girls and/or their parents regarding marriage, but they feature much less prominently: only three of 10 girls mentioned community leaders, and two of 10 mentioned religious leaders as key actors in their social networks.

Parental Influence and Decision-Making Networks

Turning to the results of the interviews with parents (not shown in **Table 11** above), among the six mothers interviewed, five had never attended school, and one had completed lower secondary education. Among the six fathers, three had completed primary school, one had completed secondary school, and two had not attended formal education. Both mothers and fathers described playing active roles—often jointly with their spouses—in decisions regarding their daughters' education. Mothers reported rarely receiving advice from immediate or extended family members or community leaders on schooling matters. Consistent with mothers' accounts, fathers unanimously emphasized that decisions about girls' schooling are made exclusively by parents and are seldom discussed outside the household. Nonetheless, several fathers cited their own parents and elder brothers (the girls' grandparents and uncles), as well as male cousins and friends, as influential members of their broader social networks. Across both mothers' and fathers'

accounts, discussions of educational aspirations with daughters were described as infrequent and, when they did occur, largely considered the mother's responsibility. As one father noted,

"Here, it is not customary for parents to discuss their daughter's educational aspirations. So, it is difficult, even impossible, to have someone who would give you advice on this matter. People don't even pay attention to it, let alone have someone who would advise you."
— 45-year-old father, ID#001, Tchalliga, Rapid Interview.

When asked about their daughters' future marriage, only two of the six mothers reported that their daughters, aged 11 to 15, had received proposals, both of which they declined without consulting anyone in their family or community. The remaining mothers indicated that they would also refuse such proposals, stating that they would make the decision independently. At the same time, mothers acknowledged that their husbands, extended family members (such as uncles), the village chief, and the imam are the most influential figures in marriage-related decisions, exerting considerable sway over these choices. Friends, neighbors, and other female relatives were also mentioned as having some influence, though to a lesser degree. One mother explained:

"My husband and his brothers, and in the community, my neighbor— their opinions influenced my decision the most when it came to refusing a marriage proposal [for my daughter]."
– 30-year-old mother, ID#003, Gada, Rapid Interview.

The interviews with fathers revealed that none had yet received a marriage proposal for their daughters aged 11 to 15. All fathers stated that they would refuse any such proposal, citing reasons such as legal restrictions and the increased health risks associated with early marriage and childbirth. Although fathers did not report receiving explicit advice from others regarding the appropriate age for their daughters to marry, the data indicate that their views are nonetheless shaped by those in their social networks, including their own parents, brothers, and peer groups.

Exploration of Social Norms

In this section, we present the top-line findings from the exploration of social norms conducted via **16 FGDs** with girls, parents, and community leaders. The analysis focuses on three behaviors central to educational outcomes: girls not completing secondary school, leaving school for marriage, and dropping out due to fear of or actual pregnancy. We begin by discussing the descriptive and injunctive norms associated with these behaviors, then examine positive and negative sanctions, exceptions, and key behavioral drivers. Given the overlap across population groups, we present **Tables 12-14** summarizing the findings for girls and then highlight similarities and differences across groups in the accompanying discussion. This section concludes by identifying "cracks" and exceptions in prevailing social norms that have important implications for program design and implementation. Illustrative quotes from FGDs with girls, parents, and leaders are in **Appendices X-XII**.

Social Norms Related to Dropping Out of School

"Many girls reject school. Despite being enrolled, they drop out to stay at home, attend Quranic school, or get married."
— 11-year-old girl, ID#001-P5, Tchalliga, FGD

First, we examine social norms related to girls' non-completion of secondary school, specifically, leaving school to get married, contributing economically to their family, or saving money for marriage **(Table 12).** Most girls perceived that leaving school is both common and socially acceptable. These norms are communicated and reinforced primarily by parents, peers, and siblings, and to a lesser extent by community leaders, through mechanisms such as peer pressure, judgment, gossip, and stigma. Focus group discussions also explored the underlying drivers of school dropout, revealing a widespread lack of confidence in the possibility of academic success. This stems in part from the absence of positive role

models and limited evidence that completing school yields tangible benefits. Additional factors include concerns about the quality and safety of schools, as well as the heavy burden of household chores placed on girls.

"As we grew up, we noticed that our elders did not invest in their studies, which prompted us to adopt the same attitude of disinterest toward schooling.

Our elders who studied before us did not succeed in life. They achieved neither academic success nor marriage. Even those who earned their certificate end up at home without occupation, and some will never achieve success, even until their death.

Even with education, we do not advance in our academic path. One can obtain a diploma and then be forced to stay at home. We then find ourselves considered adults, but neither married nor professionally accomplished. That is why we lose interest in studying."
– 15, 14 and 13-year-old girls, ID#002-P4, P2, & P5, Gada, FGD

Results from the parent and leader interviews revealed similar perspectives. Across focus groups, there was a broad consensus that girls who attend school face significant peer and social pressure to leave school and marry—pressures that come both from married friends and from young men who actively encourage girls and their parents to consent to marriage. Although some school and community leaders have advocated for girls' education, both parents and leaders emphasized that persistent financial hardship, coupled with parents' limited education and economic insecurity, constrains families' ability to fully appreciate the value of education, remain engaged in their daughters' schooling, or provide consistent support.

Leaders also identified additional barriers, including teachers' limited authority and influence, poor education quality that leaves students ill-prepared for secondary school, and adolescents' phone use, which they believe can undermine learning and contribute to romantic relationships that prompt parents to withdraw girls from school. Parents, on the other hand, focused more on perceptions of injustice and corruption within schools—such as favoritism and irregular grading practices—which have eroded both parents' and girls' trust and motivation to participate in the formal education system. For example, a mother commented,

"Regarding the involvement of mothers, we aspire for our daughters to receive both conventional and Quranic education, as this provides essential knowledge. Nevertheless, due to past failures, the entire community—regardless of sex or age—expresses a certain reluctance. Our motivation is weakened by skepticism about the value of an educational system that has not demonstrated its effectiveness for previous generations. Even when a mother closely supervises her daughter's schooling to promote academic growth, she may face paternal resistance. During adolescence, the situation becomes even more complex, as some fathers fear community gossip."
— 47-year-old mother, ID#001-P5, Tchalliga, FGD

Table 12. Social Norms, Sanctions, Rewards, and Exceptions Influencing Girls' Non-Completion of Secondary School

Behavior	**Non-Completion of Secondary School** • **Leaving school to get married** • **Leaving school to help the family economically** • **Leaving school to save money for marriage**	
Descriptive Norm	It is uncommon for girls to complete secondary school.	
Injunctive Norm	It is acceptable for girls to drop out of school.	
Reference Groups *(in order of influence)*	**Positive/Negative Sanctions**	**Drivers**

• Parents • Peers/friends • Siblings/other elder family members • Community and religious leaders	• Peer pressure • Judgment, gossip, stigma	• Belief that academic failure is inevitable • Lack of role models (past or present) of girls who stay in school and achieve success (e.g., employment) • Perceptions of injustice and corruption in schools • Belief that some girls lack intellectual capacity or drive to succeed • Perception that staying in school has little practical or economic value • Safety concerns (bullying, male harassment) • Heavy household chores limiting time • Poverty and economic constraints
Exceptions	• Some girls, parents and leaders believe there is value in continued schooling, even if the benefits are modest. • Girls are permitted to stay in school if they demonstrate exceptional academic performance or strong potential for success. • Girls may continue their education if they can prove they are not engaging in behavior considered "dishonorable**"** (e.g., romantic or sexual relationships with boys).	

Social Norms Related to Leaving School for Marriage

"A girl who has already grown up and lives at home with her father and mother seems a bit unusual, so it's better to marry her off. Truly, here in the village, if children stay too much at home, it worries us parents, and it is this worry that really troubles us."
– 35-year-old mother, ID#002-P1, Tchalliga, FGD

Leaving school for marriage and childbearing was also viewed by girls as normative**—**common, acceptable, and expected. In addition to the reference groups relevant to girls not completing school listed in **Table 12**, boys and prospective husbands also play a significant role in reinforcing these norms **(Table 13).** Negative sanctions for remaining in school extend beyond gossip and stigma to include a reduced likelihood of securing a desirable marriage**.** Conversely, early marriage carries positive social rewards—such as preserving family honor and enhancing social status by fulfilling a woman's respected role within the community. For many, these perceived benefits make marriage a more attractive and certain path than continuing education, particularly given the strong cultural and religious emphasis on traditional roles between men and women and the uncertainty of economic returns from schooling**.** Moreover, participants expressed concern that delaying marriage diminishes a girl's prospects, leading to less favorable arrangements—such as marriages without dowry.

While parents mentioned the social pressures and stigma their daughters may face for remaining in school and delaying marriage, they also described experiencing strong social pressure themselves. Both mothers and fathers reported that families are often harshly judged by the broader community for not marrying their daughters soon after puberty. As one father explained,

"In truth, a girl's marriage is arranged as soon as the first signs of puberty appear, to avoid social judgment. If an adolescent shows these physical signs without being married, the community criticizes her parents, accusing them of refusing to marry off their daughter despite her physical maturity."
— 35-year-old father, ID#002-P5, Tchalliga, FGD

Across focus groups with leaders, there was a consistent belief that marrying girls at the onset of puberty is sanctioned by Islam. Leaders described such marriages as religiously approved and socially celebrated. Girls, parents, and leaders alike commented that once girls reach puberty, they may become more

"rebellious," less deferential to elders, and more likely to engage in premarital relationships—particularly if they continue attending school. As a result, school withdrawal and marriage are often viewed as protective measures to preserve family honor and prevent perceived moral risk. Finally, parents and leaders acknowledged that these beliefs are deeply entrenched in long-standing traditions of early marriage, reinforced by perceptions that girls today are maturing earlier and expressing greater interest in marriage than in previous generations.

As a school director explained:

> *"Girls leave school to marry primarily for reasons related to tradition and religious principles... Tradition refers to long-established practices in our community: in this village, girls are married from the age of 13. Thus, when a schoolgirl reaches this age, the tendency is to withdraw her from the education system to marry her off. Regarding the religious aspect, the first speaker mentioned the "Hadith," which permits very early marriage, starting at age 13. These two factors together explain why girls marry at an early age. Parents also believe that girls' roles are primarily limited to domestic tasks and managing the household, which constitutes a third reason. This is why they are married very early, between the ages of 11 and 15, for those who can wait a little longer."*
>
> – 45-year-old School Director, ID#002-P1, Tchalliga, FGD

Table 13. Exploration of Social Norms, Sanctions, Rewards and Exceptions Related to Girls Leaving School for Marriage

Behavior	Girls Leaving School to Get Married • Girls leave school to marry and begin childbearing • Girls who marry and have children do not return to school	
Descriptive Norm	It is common for girls to leave school to get married.	
Injunctive Norm	It is acceptable, and expected, for girls to leave school to get married.	
Reference Groups ***(in order of influence)***	**Positive/negative sanctions**	**Drivers**
• **Parents** • **Peers/friends and boys** • **Siblings/other elder family members** • **Community and religious leaders**	• Peer pressure • Judgment, gossip, and stigma • Reduced chances of securing a desirable husband • Preservation or loss of family honor • Praise from community/celebration • Increased social standing for fulfilling expected roles in the household • Spiritual rewards/blessings	• Belief that remaining in school increases the risk of premarital pregnancy • Perception that marriage offers tangible short- and long-term benefits, while the returns on education are uncertain • Belief that marriage is more important than continued schooling • Desire to marry for love • Perception that marrying earlier provides greater control in choosing a desirable husband
Exceptions	• Girls may stay in school and delay marriage if they demonstrate strong academic ability and success. • Girls may stay in school and delay marriage if they are considered 'too young' or not physically mature. • In a few cases, husbands may provide financial and moral support for their wives to continue their education.	

Social Norms Related to Sex before Marriage

"The reaction is unanimous; our entire community fears pregnancies outside of marriage and strives to prevent them."
14-year-old girl, ID#002-P2, Gada, FGD

The topic of premarital sex was also explored, as it is frequently cited as a primary reason for girls' withdrawal from school. Girls, parents, and community leaders all emphasized that one of the main motivations for removing girls from school is to protect them from the perceived risk of premarital pregnancy and the wide array of social and spiritual sanctions believed to accompany it. Study participants also characterized this decision as a means of safeguarding family honor and preparing girls for marriage **(Table 14).**

This deeply rooted fear of premarital pregnancy was reinforced by firsthand accounts from girls, parents, and leaders who had witnessed the harm such situations caused for both the girl and her family within the wider community. As the President of a Youth Association explained:

"When a young girl becomes a mother out of wedlock, the situation becomes extremely delicate... Given the harm that has already occurred, marriage often appears as a preventive solution... When a concerning situation is detected with his [the father's] daughter, marriage is preferable."
— 52-year-old President of Youth Association, ID#002-P1, Gada, FGD.

Parents, siblings, elderly family members, and community leaders strongly enforce this norm through strict sanctions. Girls who engage in—or are suspected of engaging in—premarital sex, along with their children, families, and communities, experience loss of honor, gossip, and stigma. Conversely, marriage serves to restore or preserve family honor and uphold religious values.

Drivers of premarital sexual activity are typically linked to romantic relationships or situations where boys seduce girls. To avoid the risk of pregnancy and its associated social consequences, many girls leave school preemptively. Parents often encourage or enforce this decision, motivated by a desire to protect their daughters' and families' reputations (in cases of premarital pregnancy, mothers are often blamed for their daughters' situations, though both parents face social isolation and shame). Some participants further discussed other underlying drivers of these dynamics, including the absence of a clear legal framework or enforcement mechanisms to hold boys accountable when they impregnate, abuse, or harass girls. In some cases, boys' families may pay a fine, but no further action may be taken, reinforcing the perception that boys' behavior cannot be easily controlled.

"Parents act primarily in their own interests. They strongly insist on marrying off their daughters at a young age to prevent any behavior they would consider immoral, which could tarnish the family's reputation. In a traditional context, parents also seek personal gratification and social prestige. Successfully marrying their daughter quickly gives them a sense of accomplishment and relief. This achievement earns them recognition and praise within their community."
– 45 and 50-year-old fathers, ID#001-P1 & P4, Tchalliga, FGD

Table 14. Exploration of Social Norms, Sanctions, Rewards, and Exceptions Related to Engaging in Premarital Sex

Behavior	Girls Cannot Have Sex Before Marriage • Girls drop out or are withdrawn from school due to fears for their safety and protection • Girls leave school or are disenrolled early to get married

Descriptive Norm	N/A (*Descriptive norms about adolescent girls' engaging in sexual relations were not mentioned during FGDs*)	
Injunctive Norm	Adolescent girls should not have sex or bear children before marriage.	
Reference Groups ***(in order of influence)***	**Positive/negative sanctions**	**Drivers**
• **Parents** • **Peers/friends and boys** • **Siblings/other elder family members** • **Community and religious leaders**	• Spiritual sanctions • Loss of honor, gossip, and stigma directed at girls, their children, and their parents • Reduced chances of getting married (due to stigma and discrimination) • Loss of honor and reputation extended to the wider community • Spiritual rewards/blessings • Source of parental pride and happiness • Preservation of family honor through abstinence or marriage	• Boys may attempt to seduce or make sexual advances towards girls • Girls may form romantic or sexual relationships with boys they meet at school • Belief that if girls remain in school, they are at higher risk of premarital pregnancy
Exceptions	None identified — there are no recognized exceptions or "cracks" in the norm prohibiting premarital sex.	

Opportunities to Leverage "Cracks" and Exceptions to Social Norms

In discussions with study participants, we explored circumstances in which norms related to girls' continued schooling and delayed marriage are perceived as flexible or may not need to be followed. Notably, many of these exceptions were identified by community leaders. Such situations help reveal opportunities to leverage existing norms to promote positive change. Overall, there is broad support for girls' education; however, certain circumstances take precedence over this value. The "cracks" we identified relate to conditions that make girls' educational achievement and delayed marriage more acceptable, beneficial, and feasible for families—particularly when these paths are viewed as lower risk.

The most salient exception concerns girls who demonstrate exceptional academic ability. When girls show strong academic promise, it is considered acceptable for them to continue their education, especially if financial support is available through scholarships or if families can mobilize resources, such as selling property, to fund their studies. This flexibility is even greater when education is perceived as directly leading to employment opportunities after graduation. Other exceptions relate to financial or marital circumstances. When economic constraints delay a wedding, whether due to limited resources on the part of the boy's or the girl's family, it is acceptable for the girl to remain in school. Similarly, if both families of an engaged girl agree that she will continue her education, especially when the groom's family cannot afford the marriage ceremony, delaying marriage becomes socially legitimate.

Some exceptions depend on the girl's characteristics or behavior. For example, if a girl demonstrates that she is not engaging in behavior considered "dishonorable" (such as relationships with boys), does not show physical signs of maturity, or is viewed as "too young" for marriage, it may be acceptable for her to remain in school. Finally, certain structural interventions can weaken or circumvent social norms. Respondents noted that legal measures or policies supporting girls' education and delayed marriage could make these behaviors more socially acceptable. Similarly, providing separate housing or accommodation for girls attending school outside their village could help reduce concerns about safety and reputation, making

continued education more feasible. In contrast, participants did not identify any "cracks" or exceptions in the strong norms prohibiting premarital sex.

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this chapter, we present a discussion of the Re-IMAGINE program's findings by intervention level (shown in **Figure 1**), including community, school, household, and girls' groups.

Factors Relevant to Community Interventions

More than half of community leaders (55%) agree that most girls in the community are married before 16 years and that the community generally approves of early marriage. Leaders view marriage at puberty as sanctioned by Islam, reinforcing its social legitimacy. According to a 55-year-old village chief:

"Our tradition, combined with our religious beliefs, also encourages young girls to marry as soon as they reach puberty."

— 55-year-old Village Chief, ID#001-P1, Gada, FGD.

Community leaders listed the ideal marriage age for girls as 16.2 years, with the youngest acceptable age being 15.9 years.

There was broad consensus among community leaders, parents, and girls that withdrawing girls from school and marrying them early was viewed as the most effective way to prevent pregnancy outside marriage, uphold religious values, and protect family honor. School attendance and marital status are deeply intertwined in community perceptions, reflecting a conflation of education and marriage, where being both in school and unmarried is seen as heightening the risk of premarital pregnancy and social stigma. The consensus that school heightens the risk of premarital pregnancy may be a function of girls in school being largely unmarried, and due to the view that girls in school may be interacting with boys either at school or during transit to and from school. Education, however, was regarded as protective when it clearly led to economic advancement.

Marriage decisions involve wider social networks than those related to school, with female friends or peers more predominant. Girls seldom discuss marriage directly with parents, often relying on siblings and extended family members as intermediaries. Mothers noted that final decisions rest with men—husbands, uncles, village chiefs, and imams—and that, like their daughters, they experience strong social pressure to conform to community expectations. Girls report that their mothers and fathers are the main decision-makers, with 77% saying fathers are the final decision-makers, with 9% reporting their mothers. Girls also report that mothers, fathers, and uncles/aunts are the main decision-makers around marriage, with 71% saying fathers are the final decision-makers, 14% saying uncles and aunts, and 7% saying mothers.

Parents may seek outside support when faced with a decision about marriage. Imams and village chiefs are a common source of support for some parents. For example, 20% of parents report going to an Imam for advice on a daughter's marriage, and 14% report seeking advice from the village chief(s). It is twice as common for a father (28%) to go to an Imam as a mother (13%). However, about 90% of parents report that family is the primary source of advice for marriage decisions concerning their daughters.

Factors Relevant to School Interventions

School availability varies considerably across communities. According to community leaders, nearly all communities (97%) have at least one primary school. However, access to secondary education is far more limited—only 35% of leaders report their communities have a nearby secondary school, and just 13% have one located within the community. According to a 50-year-old father,

"Parents are reluctant to let their daughters be far from home for fear that they might engage in morally inappropriate behavior"
—50-year-old father, ID#001-P4, Tchalliga, FGD.

Community leaders report widespread school attendance among primary school-aged girls: 67% of 7-year-olds, 53% of 13-year-olds, and 35% of 17-year-olds. When speaking with families, one-third (33%) of families reported that they had never sent any children to school, and nearly half (45%) of families indicated that they had never sent a daughter to school. Only 16% of families reported that any child, girl or boy, had ever attended grades 7-9, and virtually none reported attendance beyond grade 9. Although secondary school is rare for all children, families were twice as likely to have sent a boy to grades 10 or higher as a girl.

The qualitative results indicate that teachers had limited authority or **influence in girls' decisions to enroll or stay in school**. For girls who attend school, however, teachers were reported to encourage perseverance. Among community leaders and parents, girls' continued education is considered acceptable when they show strong academic promise, particularly if financial support or clear employment prospects are available. As stated by a 65-year-old COGES leader (*Comité de Gestion des Etablissement Scolaires,* also known as a school management committee):

"I believe that continuing schooling to delay marriage is possible for girls, particularly if they receive ongoing support. For example, a girl who has obtained her junior secondary certification receives 24,000 francs at the high school level [through a government scholarship for secondary school]. With improved learning conditions, they can focus on their studies despite obstacles."
– 65-year-old COGES leader, ID#001-P2, Gada, FGD.

The lack of role models in the community was also cited by girls, parents, and leaders across focus groups as a salient driver of **school dropout**. Elder sisters or friends who have attended school but did not succeed, along with their parents and extended family members, strongly influence younger girls' motivation to continue their studies. As stated by a father,

"We have no examples of women who have prospered thanks to their education, become teachers, or hold positions that allow them to support their families financially···.This phenomenon is all the more striking as we regularly meet bright young girls with remarkable potential who abandon their education due to the lack of inspiring figures with whom they can identify."
– 57-year-old father and schoolteacher, ID#001-P1, Gada, FGD.

In addition to the influence of family and peers, religious expectations also shape girls' schooling pathways. Girls interviewed noted, "Religious authorities prioritize girls' attendance at Quranic school over formal education, which leads some of them to abandon conventional schooling," and that "Some religious leaders criticize parents for allowing their daughters to attend traditional schools while neglecting their Quranic education."

There are notable disparities in school attendance and literacy **between fathers, mothers, and daughters**. For instance, 18% of fathers had reportedly attended a government school at some point in their lifetime, compared to only 8% of mothers. Fathers also demonstrate significantly higher literacy levels: 62% report being able to read and write, and 17% identify as fully literate in at least one language. In contrast, fewer than 20% of mothers reported being able to read or write even "some" words, and less than 1% consider themselves literate in any single language.

Survey findings indicate that educational access for the current generation of girls has improved significantly compared to their mothers, with girls attending at five times the rate of previous generations. However, literacy gains have been far more modest; girls are only twice as likely as their mothers to read and write. On average, girls who have ever attended school completed only about four years of education, typically leaving by age 10.6. Very few girls continue beyond primary school, with just 17% progressing to junior secondary. Only 24% of girls can read and write, compared to 11% of mothers. These findings point to **persistent challenges in education quality** and highlight how poor learning outcomes contribute to high attrition rates.

Educational history and family aspirations influence the household's prioritization of education. Parents typically cite work at home and lack of academic progress as reasons why their daughters are not in school. About a fifth of parents attribute their daughter's current non-attendance at school to their own "negligence" – not necessarily a willful non-registration, but a lack of initiative and prioritizing it as important. In their responses, some parents note that they actively regret this. Parents broadly agree that it would be good for their daughters to be back in school to receive more education (in theory) and have slightly higher aspirations – in terms of re-enrollment and achievement – for girls who have attended school.

Leaving school for marriage and childbearing is widely seen as normative – common and expected. Remaining in school can invite stigma and harm marriage prospects, whereas early marriage brings social approval, preserves family honor, and fulfills traditional social roles. As stated by out-of-school girls during an FGD,

"If she [a girl] delays her marriage until a later age, she will be stigmatized as a 'Saon' (one who remains single while all her friends are married and becomes the object of mockery)." As stated by another girl: *"If young girls delayed their marriage, although it could be attributed to divine will, the villagers would interpret it as an inability to attract a partner."*
– 14-year-old girls, ID#002-P2 & P4, Gada, FGD.

School departure tends to reflect **low confidence in educational outcomes**, weak role models, poor school quality and safety, and heavy household workloads for girls. Some participants noted that stronger policies supporting girls' education, legal protections, and safe housing for students studying away from home could make continued schooling and delayed marriage more acceptable. According to a 70-year-old village leader,

"The existence of a universal law is necessary because, without a legal framework, some will not follow recommendations while others may naturally allow their daughters to continue their education. Clear legislation would encourage greater progress."
—70-year-old leader, ID#002-P5, Gada, FGD.

Factors Relevant to Household Interventions

Decision-making about **girls' schooling** rests primarily with parents—typically fathers—with little discussion outside the household. Mothers are most often responsible for conversations with daughters, while siblings and extended family, mainly male, indirectly influence educational choices.

Fathers largely dominate decision-making around children's schooling. Eighty four percent of fathers reported being the primary decision-makers, while 13% described the decision as joint, and only 2% said mothers made the decision. Mothers' responses were somewhat different—60% said fathers make the decisions, 20% described them as joint, and 9% said mothers decide. These differences suggest that

mothers and fathers may not share the same perception of decision-making authority, particularly regarding education. While there is somewhat greater alignment on marriage decisions, data indicate that male household members—whether present or not—typically hold final authority. Interestingly, within joint-parent households, mothers appear to exert more influence over schooling decisions than fathers may recognize.

At the household level, mothers tend to prefer a slightly earlier marriage age for girls (15.9 years), while fathers prefer 16.1 years. Most mothers (79%) agree that their communities expect most girls to marry before the age of 16; 76% of mothers view their communities as generally approving of early marriage for girls. Among fathers, 64% agree that the community expects most girls to marry before age 16; 61% view their communities as generally approving of early marriage.

For **plans around marriage** within the household, mothers tend to worry that their daughter is too old, while fathers worry that they are too young, suggesting that women feel more social pressure related to marriage than men. At the time of the survey, most parents (76%) did not believe their daughter (between ages 11-15) was old enough to marry. Interestingly, this suggests that parents may perceive community norms around marriage as acceptable before 16 but may not be ready to agree to it for their own daughter. According to the parents, the most important factor for marriage is whether their daughter wants to or feels ready to get married. Girls and their parents generally agree that the desired age for marriage is about 16.5 years, with parents skewing early at 16.4 and girls later at 16.7. These sentiments are supported by the fact that, among families with an older sister, about 53% of those families are married between the ages of 16 and 17.

Factors Relevant to Girls Groups

School history for girls varies, though the reasons for dropout are intertwined. Girls shared a variety of reasons that contributed to them not being in school, such as parental illness or loss of the person who was paying for them to attend, the need to support work at home or financially contribute to their family, the failure to progress academically, and harsh discipline or fear of harsh discipline at school. Girls and parents during FGDs additionally cited numerous reasons for school drop-out, including stigma and peer pressure for staying in school/delaying marriage, harassment, and fear of premarital pregnancy. Financial hardship often underlies many of these factors, shaping parental decisions, limiting girls' ability to remain in school, and turning to early marriage as an economic coping strategy. Some girls reported that they left simply because they no longer wanted to attend, but this sentiment often reflected deeper, overlapping pressures. Among girls who have never attended school, the most common response was that there was no **parental or familial support for education**. This response suggests that parents and family members are the primary reason girls are never introduced to the school environment, while dropping out is influenced by a number of other factors beyond the parents' sentiments, including harassment by males. As stated, during an FGD,

> *"On the way home, several boys attempt to take advantage of girls. Parents, therefore, withdraw their daughters from school because they cannot guarantee their protection. They do not always have a companion or an older sister to accompany them after classes."*
>
> –11-year-old girl, ID#001-P5, Tchalliga, FGD.

Distinguishing between girls who never enrolled and those who later left school is critical, as the reasons differ, with the former being primarily influenced by parental attitudes toward girls' education, while the latter is driven by broader sociocultural factors.

Educational aspirations were identified among many of the girls, reflecting a general interest in pursuing formal education options. Most girls say they would attend school if they were the main decision-maker. However, the percentage of girls who say they would attend school is somewhat lower among those who

have previously attended. It is unclear whether this difference is due to age since girls who have already attended school tend to be older and are less likely to express an intention to return—or whether it reflects a more realistic understanding of the challenges and conditions of attending school. A very high percentage of girls say they want to complete senior secondary, despite fewer than 1% of girls in their families ever having attended. This reflects a strong desire and hope for an educational future, despite this not being the social norm or an option readily available to them. Girls believe that school can provide them with the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, and an identity that would enable them to better contribute to the collective good of their families and communities: As stated by a girl interviewed:

A young girl may choose to continue her studies to gain more knowledge and potentially pursue a profession such as teaching, nursing, or any other career."
– 13-year-old girl, ID#002-P3, Tchalliga, FGD.

Some girls expressed aspirations to be health workers, police officers, and soldiers.

Plans around marriage are generally consistent for most girls. Overwhelmingly, 97% of girls have not talked to their parents about the age at which they want to marry. Most girls (over 70%) do not believe they could talk or convince the primary decision-maker in their household to back out of marriage if they wanted to. Girls say that the community's ideal marriage age is 15.7 years old, and they themselves want to marry at 16.7 years old. As stated during FGDs:

"Young girls generally delegate their older sisters to discuss [the younger sister's] marriage with their parents."
– 15-year-old girl, ID#001-P5, Tchalliga, FGD.

"Parents would be surprised to hear their daughter openly declare her matrimonial choice, and they would see it as a sign of disrespect on her part."
– 14-year-old girl, ID#002-P6, Gada, FGD

"Out of fear of family reactions, you are hesitant to discuss the topic of marriage directly with your mother…It would be better to ask a family member to convey this information."
– 15-year-old girl, ID#002-P4, Gada, FGD.

Still, only 1.3% of girls have asked someone else to talk to the decision-maker about marriage, and only 5.6% say they plan to do so.

Girls express **views that are less congruent with community norms than their parents and community leaders do**. They perceive community views towards schooling and marriage as stricter than their own personal beliefs. Specifically, girls are more likely to believe that their communities expect most girls to marry before the age of 16 and generally approve of this. Their perception rates—83% for community agreement on early marriage and 81% for general approval—are markedly higher than the 55% rates reported by community leaders and parents. Interestingly, girls' responses align more closely with those of their mothers than with their fathers or the broader community, suggesting that mothers may have a unique influence or share similar experiences with their daughters regarding societal expectations.

Strengths and Limitations

The quantitative component of data collection was in general smooth, despite some logistical challenges created by the rainy season. GRADE Africa was able to get assistance from local leaders in locating interviewees whom they initially had trouble finding. Other challenges during data collection included occasional slow-downs caused by making updates to the programmed files in the SurveyCTO backend and troubleshooting. In some Mirriah villages, as well, there were persistent difficulties in finding girls; these

villages were eventually replaced. Overall, the survey was successful in achieving its objectives in terms of sampling size and procedure.

During the first few days of quantitative survey, there were a number of variables for which more than 10 percent of answers were recorded as Don't know or Refused. In response, the quantitative team and GRADE Africa discussed strategies to make participants more comfortable in giving answers, and this rate gradually came down as survey progressed. On a few norm perceptions variables, GRADE Africa shared during the first week of survey that some participants could be subject to confusion and report what they would like to be the norm rather than what is happening in their community. The quantitative team and GRADE Africa discussed strategies to address this and agreed on emphasizing to enumerators the need to clarify these questions to get accurate reports of how things actually are in participants' communities.

The quantitative team also surfaced some issues with duplicate IDs and name-ID mismatches through post collection data checks; however, in collaboration with GRADE Africa, they were able to be resolved prior to the end of fieldwork. In general, thorough training and checks built into the back end of the survey worked effectively to minimize improbable responses, reducing the extent of data quality issues. Broadly, survey results displayed good internal consistency (such as between the norms and vignettes sections).

One strength of the quantitative survey design is that it enables comparison between parents' and girls' own perspectives on factors limiting their education and pushing them towards early marriage. For every girl who was successfully interviewed for the girls' survey and whose selected parent completed the parents survey, we can compare the reasons cited by herself and her selected parent for why she never attended or dropped out of school, as well as her own and her parent's preferences regarding her future marriage and schooling. Another strength of the design lies in repeating questions gauging community norms across the girls', parents' and leaders' surveys, which allows us to learn any potential gaps in norm perceptions between girls themselves and adults, between mothers and fathers, and between male and female leaders.

Qualitative data collection encountered several challenges, each of which was addressed through corresponding adjustments. First, the length and complexity of the FGDs often exceeded the estimated time, particularly with mothers' groups; to address this, the teams reorganized questions and prioritized key themes. Second, the rainy season in Niger disrupted scheduling, prompting the data collection team to adopt a flexible approach. Third, adolescents' shyness about sensitive topics occasionally limited their responses; however, interviewers addressed this by using icebreaker exercises, starting with neutral, light questions, and reaffirming the confidentiality of interview responses. Finally, data transcription and analysis required substantial time, often requiring re-listening and harmonization meetings to ensure rigor and consistency.

One of the baseline assessment's main strengths lies in its in-depth qualitative approaches to exploring social norms around early marriage and girls' schooling. The process began with a highly participatory training, closely monitored to ensure participants' understanding, mastery of topics, and active engagement for continuous improvement. Data collection was then conducted in contrasting villages (large and medium-sized), involving unmarried, out-of-school adolescent girls, parents, and leaders. The use of adapted, translated, and validated tools in Hausa also enhanced both the reliability and cultural relevance of the data. Taken together, these approaches provided rich, nuanced insights into community dynamics and social realities, producing actionable evidence to inform program design and implementation.

As this baseline evaluation was focused on young girls, the interviews did not explicitly ask about perceptions of boys' marriage and schooling, and aspirations. Thus, comparisons between girls and boys in

this baseline are limited. However, we compare the status of boys with that reported in existing reports and secondary data sources in Niger. The parents' survey indicates that 17% of families had ever had a daughter attend junior secondary, and 17% had a son who had attended junior secondary. One percent of families reported ever having a daughter who attended secondary school compared with 2% of boys. Schooling rates for both boys and girls are low in the program communities of Zinder.

Chapter 5: Programmatic Recommendations

Drawing on insights from adolescent girls, parents, and community leaders, the following recommendations aim to foster an enabling environment for girls' participation in Re-IMAGINE activities and for parents and community leaders engaged in complementary program components. While Re-IMAGINE girls differ from the girls participating in the Pathways to Scale program, the substantial progress in delaying marriage in Nigeria over the past 7 years, coinciding with the Pathways program, indicates the potential for lasting changes for girls in Niger.

The baseline results underscore the need for multi-level interventions that pair social norms shifting and improvements in educational quality with financial support for girls' school-related costs.

At the community level, Re-IMAGINE will implement norm-shifting interventions, such as dialogues with participating communities, to give them a leading role in decisions that affect their communities. Re-IMAGINE will also mobilize community and religious leaders who serve as guardians of customs and habits, who can exert a strong cultural, religious, or social influence on the community. The work with SAA and Fada groups, engagement with religious leaders, and later work with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)/School Management Committees (SMCs)/ Comité de Gestion de l'Éducation Non Formelle (CGENF) will all include goal setting and action planning, enabling clear purpose and goal setting of these groups, as well as easy monitoring of progress against these goals and action plans.

At the household level, Re-IMAGINE will intentionally involve both fathers and mothers early in program activities, recognizing their distinct but complementary roles in influencing girls' education and marriage decisions. By involving parents in awareness-raising efforts, the program aims to strengthen their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting their children's education. In parallel, it will support parent groups committed to challenging and transforming discriminatory social norms that sustain child marriage and impede girls' educational attainment. The concurrence of mothers and girls shows the importance of engaging mothers in literacy or awareness-raising sessions to create an environment more conducive to schooling and support for girls' education. SAA groups will provide opportunities to identify parents who can serve as champions for girls' education and promote family dialogue that fosters intergenerational discussion. These efforts will be reinforced through the Fada groups and engaging with girls participating in the Girls Collectives.

At the school level, the most salient exception concerns girls who demonstrate exceptional academic ability. When girls show strong academic promise, it is considered acceptable for them to continue their education, especially if financial support is available through scholarships or if families can mobilize resources, such as selling property, to fund their studies. As Re-IMAGINE prepares for girls to transition to formal schooling following their one-year participation in the Girls' Collectives, key efforts will focus not only on building community awareness and support for educational activities, but also on strengthening school support systems through PTAs, SMCs, and CGENFs. As girls, parents, and community members address the norm-related barriers related to girls' school attendance and retention through SAA sessions, Fada Groups, and engagement with religious leaders, Re-Imagine will also strengthen schooling quality and parental engagement in formal education. These efforts aim to ensure that parents understand and value local schooling options and view education as a positive pathway for their daughters. Testimonials from local girls who have succeeded through education will be integrated into Girls' Collectives to help raise their aspirations and enforce positive norms.

At the girls' group level, recognizing that many girls do not discuss marriage decisions with their parents but instead confide in friends and trusted adults, the Girls' Collectives will serve as a key platform for building

and strengthening peer relationships. They will also help girls identify supportive adults—such as facilitators, teachers, religious and traditional leaders, and local health workers—with whom they can talk and seek guidance.

Additionally, leadership and life skills activities are designed to support girls' reflections, aspirations, and goal planning, while enhancing communication and decision-making competencies to support them in navigating sensitive topics such as marriage. Practical, age-appropriate activities to practice these competencies are included throughout all leadership and life skills lessons. **Table 15** outlines the specific Re-IMAGINE actions developed in response to these baseline findings.

To ensure adaptive management, Re-IMAGINE will establish a **participatory monitoring system** involving girls, parents, and community leaders. Annual learning reviews with CARE, SongES, and key participant groups (e.g. Girls Collective facilitators, religious leaders, parents, and community members involved in the SAA process and Fada groups) will inform program adaptation. Regular reviews of trends in attendance, academic performance, and implementation fidelity will be conducted jointly with participants, staff and partners. In addition to sharing baseline results with community leaders, Re-IMAGINE will document and share good practices and lessons learned at the regional and national levels.

Table 15. Action Points for Re-IMAGINE from Baseline by level of Intervention

Levels of Intervention	Findings	Recommendations	Operational Points Incorporated in Re-IMAGINE
Community	In Niger, social norms strongly support early marriage, reinforced by religious and community leaders.	**Engage leaders early and build a shared vision.** Involve religious, community, and school leaders from the outset to ensure a common understanding of Re-IMAGINE's goals and the value it brings to girls, their families, and the wider community.	Religious and community leaders' engagement is the foundation of the Re-IMAGINE program. This is an essential intervention mirroring what was done in Pathways to Choice. These leaders serve as both allies and gatekeepers, and their deep involvement is critical throughout all phases of implementation. Key engagement points include: • **Initial engagement:** Conduct entry meetings with traditional and religious leaders prior to the baseline to introduce Re-IMAGINE and clarify that not all villages will receive the same treatment. • **Programmatic adaptation:** Build on CGE experiences for meaningfully engaging religious leaders, including organizing meetings with administrative and traditional authorities to share research findings and co-design interventions aimed at transforming harmful social norms. • **Ongoing collaboration:** Maintain continuous engagement with religious leaders throughout project implementation, including their participation in reviewing the curriculum and involvement in planned project activities.
Household	Girls perceive greater community pressure to marry early than parents or leaders	Reinforce parental support for girls' education and delayed marriage,	Re-IMAGINE will implement targeted interventions to shift norms and strengthen parental support for girls' education and delayed marriage.

	report, and **fathers are widely seen as the primary decision-makers** for both education and marriage. However, mothers often play a more active role in shaping daughters' choices, while recognizing that these decisions are often shaped by a complex web of influences, including siblings, extended family, peers, and community leaders.	with targeted engagement of fathers as key decision-makers	• **SAA groups**: Establish and support 60 SAA groups with 1800 members across 38 villages, composed of parents, community leaders, and girls. Champions and role models will be identified within communities, and testimonials from educated girls will be used to inspire families and provide alternatives to early marriage. • **Fada groups**: Form 60 Fada groups with 1200 members in the same 38 villages. These groups will engage fathers and male community members as influential decision-makers, and foster dialogues and commitment related to girls' education and delayed marriage within their households and community-wide.
School	Reasons for never enrolling or not attending school included lack of family support, need to work, lack of interest, and **lack of academic progress**. Students, parents, and leaders perceive it as **acceptable for girls to drop out of school**.	Engage parents and school leaders on the value of education. **Pair advocacy with practical support.**	• **Parent-leader coordination**: Build coordination and communication mechanisms between parents and leaders through regular public assemblies and joint planning sessions. These gatherings can also serve as opportunities to showcase program achievements and highlight **positive role models** who inspire girls and parents to prioritize continued education. • **Safeguarding and risk mitigation**: Establish and implement procedures at the school level to ensure girls' safety and well-being, including protection from corporal punishment. • **Comité de Gestion de l'Éducation Non Formelle (CGENF):** Strengthen CGENF to reinforce accountability for the safety of girls, especially during transit to and from school, and advocate against corporal punishment within schools and communities. • **Safety and Accountability Mechanisms**: Establish feedback and accountability systems to ensure the safety of girls during transit to and from school, including regular monitoring and community reporting mechanisms.
Girls	**Girls expressed strong aspirations**: 70% said they would attend school if they could decide for	Work with younger girls (11-13) and their families to help shape education aspirations early, and support	• **Code of Conduct** for Facilitators: Develop and enforce a clear code of conduct that explicitly prohibits corporal punishment and any form of violence against children, responding directly to girls' reports that fear

	themselves, and 44% hoped to complete senior secondary education.	older girls (13-15) who may be facing pressure to marry early and drop out of school	of corporal punishment discourages them from attending school.

Appendix List

I. Summary statistics for baseline question items by type of survey (girl, leader, parent)
   A. Community census
   B. Girls' survey
   C. Girls survey heterogeneity by age (11-13, 14-15), whether girl has ever attended school, and above and below median GSE score
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II. Comparison of responses to norms questions and vignettes across girls', parents' and leaders' surveys

III. Balance tables for community census, girls' survey, parents' survey and leaders' survey
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IV. Surveys for quantitative data collection
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VI. Indicators whose values were gathered at the baseline

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VIII. Final FGD Codebook (Qualitative Codebook)

IX. Illustrative quotes from rapid interviews with girls and parents

X. Illustrative quotes from FGDs with girls

XI. Illustrative quotes from FGDs with parents

XII. Illustrative quotes from FGDs with leaders

XIII. Data Monitoring Roles and Responsibilities

Photo by Josh Estey/CARE

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