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Re-IMAGINE: Delaying Marriage and Childbirth to Improve Adolescent Girls' Self-Determination and Opportunity in Niger

Child, early, and forced marriage (child marriage) and its life-long consequences reflect and reinforce discrimination against women This practice disproportionately affects girls globally, putting them at increased risk of violence and early pregnancy and its associated risks, and denying them access to education and economic opportunities. One in 5 girls in the world is married before 18, driven by social norms that devalue girls and women and, in some cases, unjust laws and policies, limiting girls' decision-making, opportunity, and ability to thrive. CARE works to end child marriage by empowering girls to assert their rights, mobilizing families and communities to support them, and influencing policies to protect them.

Girls in Niger experience the world's highest rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and have the highest fertility rate in the world. These statistics, combined with some of the lowest levels of secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa, perpetuate the high rates of child marriage and early and frequent childbearing.[1] Child marriage and early childbearing drive high levels of maternal mortality and morbidity among young girls, limits their educational opportunities, and places them at a higher risk of violence.

Evidence from CARE programs and other interventions shows that addressing child marriage at scale requires multi-component, multi-level, and multisectoral interventions. CARE works holistically with adolescent girls to enhance their ability to make informed choices about their futures. It engages men, boys, and community leaders to shift harmful social norms that hinder opportunities for girls and women. Additionally, CARE builds financial skills and livelihood opportunities for women and girls to expand economic pathways beyond marriage. CARE addresses the **multifaceted reasons girls are forced into marriage young** – improving **education**, **health**, and **economic opportunities** to give girls a second chance.

Building on the learnings of IMAGINE
While much work has been done to meet the needs of married adolescent girls in Niger, significant needs persist. The Gates Foundation-supported Inspiring Married Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Empowered Futures (IMAGINE) research project (2016 – 2022) took a comprehensive approach to enhance the capabilities and autonomy of married girls. Through IMAGINE, girls formed collectives that built their

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[1] According to the World Bank, 76% of girls are married before 18; 147/1,000 girls aged 15-19 have given birth versus the average of 94/1,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Only 15% of adolescent girls have completed lower secondary education.

knowledge and skills, enabling them to make informed life choices. The project also addressed the social and structural barriers to postponing childbirth and introduced alternative economic prospects, ensuring that early motherhood was not girls' sole option.

Girls in IMAGINE interventions in Niger and Bangladesh demonstrated:
- Greater use of health services, increased social and economic mobility, and higher participation in income-generating activities.
- Increased use of contraception, including modern methods, with higher rates of use by those who have given birth than those who have not.
- Improvements in knowledge on pregnancy risk, family planning use, delaying childbirth, and income generation.
- A decline in beliefs in family planning myths and more adolescent self-determination to visit a health facility and engage in economic activities.

CARE is leveraging evidence-based approaches and key learnings from IMAGINE, along with its specialized experience on child marriage, to implement Re-IMAGINE interventions that positively change the range of factors affecting a girl's control over her body, her role in the family and community, and her future.
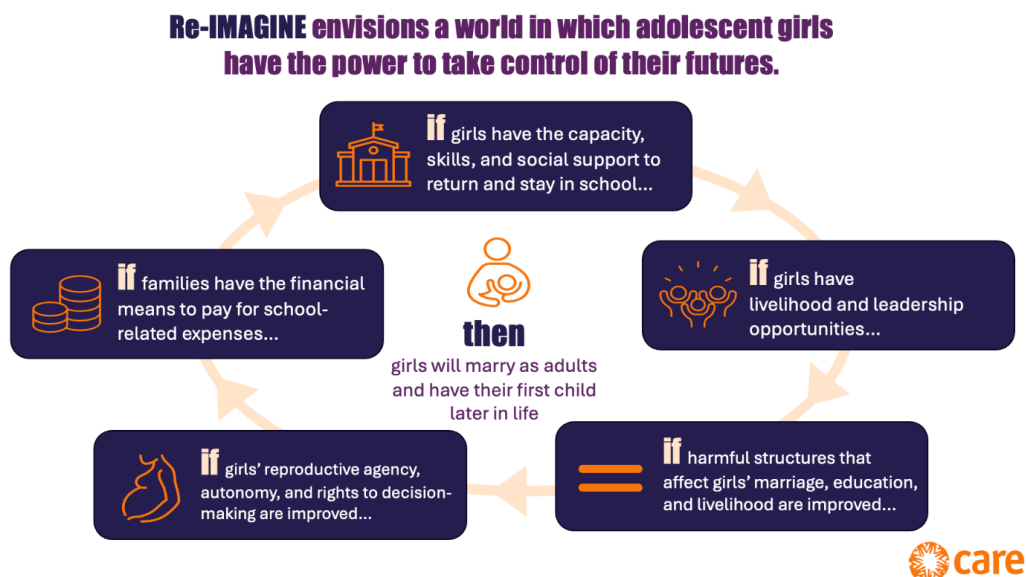
Overview of Re-IMAGINE

Re-IMAGINE is an intensive program that aims to delay child marriage by increasing girls' educational attainment and skill development while addressing harmful social norms to create a more supportive environment for young people to pursue alternative pathways to marriage.

Re-IMAGINE (2024-2029) is replicating, adapting, and testing a package of interventions developed to significantly delay the age of marriage in Zinder, Niger, for girls aged 11 to 15. Re-IMAGINE aims to reach 4,500 out-of-school **(OOS) girls** in 76 communities and is building evidence of the most effective interventions to delay marriage and age at first birth that can be **replicated and scaled in similar settings**. Re-IMAGINE tailors the Centre for Girls' Education (CGE) *Pathways to Choice* program, which was successfully implemented in northern Nigeria, adapting it to the Nigerien context.

Re-IMAGINE contains all components of the original Pathways to Choice program, including safe spaces, academic support, vocational training, and the engagement of mentors and traditional and religious leaders. CARE is leveraging its proven models to enroll unmarried girls in the Strengthening Opportunities for Adolescent Resilience (SOAR) accelerated education program[2] to expand educational and technical training opportunities that drive equal decision-making, expanded choice, and bodily autonomy for girls. Distinct from CGE, CARE also works with parents' groups and utilizes the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) methodology, which shifts unequal social norms, with women, men, boys, and girls. Through SAA, participants surface and challenge restrictive norms and act together to create more equal ones. RE-IMAGINE's theory of change is illustrated in Figure 1.

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[2] CARE's SOAR program provides a catch-up education opportunity to children who have never attended school, or who dropped out in early grades, equipping them with the skills to make positive life choices. Children and youth who graduate from SOAR are significantly less likely to be married young than those who did not participate.
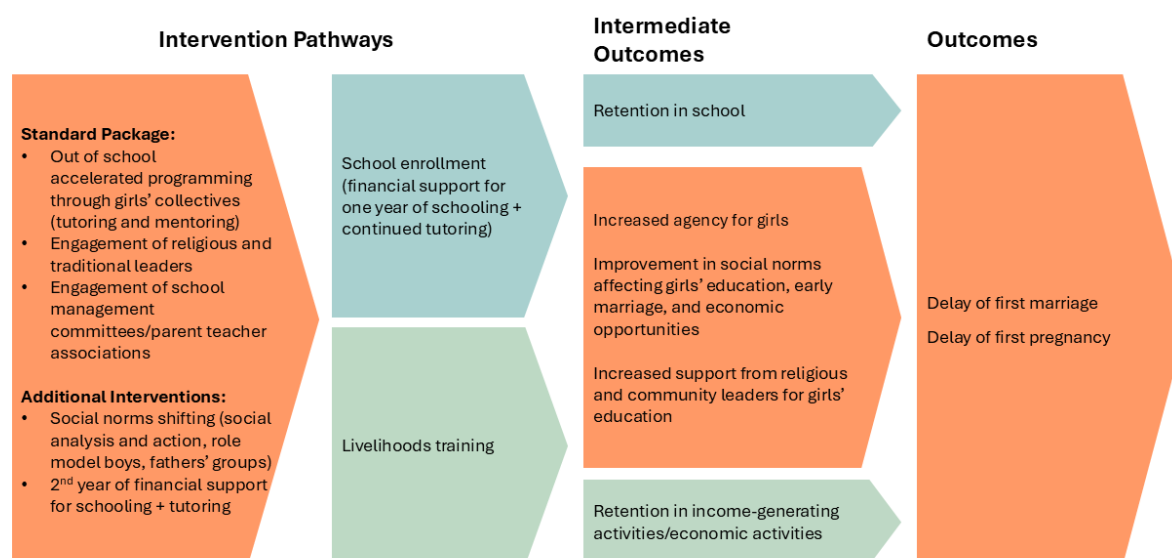
Figure 1: Re-IMAGINE's Theory of Change

Re-IMAGINE envisions a world in which adolescent girls have the power to take control of their futures.

Re-IMAGINE: Program Design

CARE is implementing interrelated interventions, as described in Figure 2, to increase girls' school enrollment and livelihood opportunities, thereby enhancing their self-determination, challenging harmful social norms, engaging religious and community leaders to promote girls' education, and increasing girls' economic opportunities.

Figure 2. Re-IMAGINE Intervention Design

Accelerated Education: Re-IMAGINE enrolls out-of-work and unmarried girls in a 10-month accelerated education program, focusing on foundational learning. This program builds on the CGE accelerated

learning curriculum, Niger's national *passerelle* accelerated basic education program, and CARE's global models. Girls learn foundational reading and math skills, as well as age-appropriate leadership, life skills, health, social transformation activities, and access to financial literacy education, leveraging CARE's Power Within model. Trained facilitators and mentors, who are mostly retired teachers, are delivering this comprehensive curriculum through girls' collectives.

Once the accelerated learning program is completed, all girls will have the opportunity to enroll for the first time or re-enroll in a local formal/public school. Girls' Collective facilitators will provide additional tutoring to improve girls' academic performance, progression, and social integration after they have transitioned to school. In Year 3, Re-IMAGINE will also provide funding for education-related costs, such as uniforms, school supplies, and school fees. For girls who return to school and remain for a second year, the project will fund the full second year of education-related costs for *half of the communities* and compare the outcomes of that extra financial support. To ensure that girls who transition to school feel supported, Re-IMAGINE will also work with local school-based parent-teacher committees and school management committees to ensure that teachers and peer students support girls in their transition to school, provide necessary tutoring or counseling support, and follow up with girls and their parents if they are absent. Also, Re-IMAGINE will reinforce the work of school management committees in safeguarding protocols and to ensure girls' protection and mitigate risk.

Re-Imagine Timeline (2025-2029)

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Main Project Interventions					
Girls Collectives and academic catch up/mentorship		10 months			
Financial support + tutoring to in-school girls			12 months	12 months	
Livelihood transition option + apprenticeship			12 months		
Working with religious and community leaders	2 years				
Social Analysis and Action (SAA)	12 months				
Role Model Boys			12 months		
Fathers (fada) groups		12 months			
Strengthening of School management committees & parent-teacher associations			14 months		
Main Research Components					
Baseline (Quantitative & Qualitative)	Data collection: July 2025				
Year 1 Assessment (Qualitative)			Data collection: Oct 2026		
End of Project Evaluation (Quantitative & Qualitative)				Data collection: Oct 2027	
Post-hoc follow-up (Quantitative and Qualitative)					Data collection: Oct 2028

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Older girls who choose not to transition to school after the 10-month accelerated education program will be offered the additional choice of pursuing a vocational livelihood pathway modeled after the CGE apprenticeship program. In these vocational training programs, the girls will learn a trade and develop microbusinesses. These girls will participate in small groups to learn, practice, and complete an apprenticeship in a relevant vocation; they will receive start-up kits to enable them to begin work immediately.

Aligned with CGE's Pathways model, Re-IMAGINE engages religious and community leaders in all participating communities. In half of the participating communities, CARE implements additional social norms interventions with boys, parents, and community and religious leaders to build a social support system for girls to delay marriage and first birth. CARE works with parents and peer boys to build acceptance for girls' education as a worthy investment and that delaying marriage and childbearing benefits the entire family. Re-IMAGINE engages boys in a process of critical reflection and dialogue on harmful social norms, aiming to build allyship with peer girls on issues such as decision-making, access to education, and delaying marriage. Participation in Role Model Boys groups aids positive transformations in power dynamics between girls and boys. In addition, Re-IMAGINE works with groups of fathers of out-of-school girls to build their support as allies of girls' education and livelihoods. SAA interventions also bring women, men, and boys and girls together to reflect, discuss, and plan specific actions to shift unequal norms in their communities.

Re-IMAGINE: Evaluation Design

Re-IMAGINE is a cluster randomized control trial (RCT) involving more than 4,500 out-of-school (OOS) unmarried girls aged 11-15 years who have not yet had their first child, in 76 communities receiving the Re-IMAGINE intervention packages, compared with a control group of 1,125 girls across 19 control communities. Re-IMAGINE is generating evidence and sharing learning to advance quality, replicable, scalable, and lasting approaches to delaying marriage and first birth among adolescent girls. The primary focus of this research component is to understand the outcomes of the adapted Pathway to Choice approach and additional CARE interventions that address the multiple drivers of early marriage and childbearing among OOS adolescent girls by implementing a package of interventions aimed at different target groups.

CARE is partnering in this research and evaluation with the University of Washington (UW), the University of California San Diego (UCSD), SongES, and GRADE Africa. To the extent possible, qualitative and quantitative survey questions are being aligned between the CARE Re-IMAGINE and CGE evaluations. Surveys and in-depth interviews are being conducted across target groups, and a cost-effectiveness analysis is planned to be completed alongside project evaluations and publications.

Potential to Scale

Through all programming, CARE supports women and girls to lead their own development and choose their own futures. Using proven, multisectoral approaches to the multifaceted challenges they face, CARE elevates the voices of women and girls, as well as community members, to decrease child marriage and increase the age at first birth, thereby transforming the health, livelihoods, and futures of adolescent girls, their families, and communities in Niger. The quantitative and qualitative results of this project will help CARE and the development sector tailor programs in other contexts, contributing to the growing movement to end child marriage and give girls a chance.

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