Country Report

Early marriage among Viet Nam's Hmong:

How unevenly changing gender norms limit Hmong adolescent girls' options in marriage and life

Nicola Jones, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Tran Thi Van Anh

Key messages

- A focus on national-level MDG achievement often overlooks key pockets of disadvantage, such as those faced by the Hmong ethnic minority in Viet Nam.

- A pervasive cultural preference for sons means that gender norms surrounding Hmong marriage practices are shifting only slowly and often in unexpected ways, despite legal changes and strong community awareness-raising efforts.

- Early marriage remains far more common among the Hmong than it does in the wider Vietnamese population; some of these marriages, particularly in more isolated villages, continue to be the result of abduction.

- Young Hmong wives are burdened with excessive work and demands on their fertility and are regularly exposed to gender-based violence fuelled by alcohol.

- An integrated package of social protection, community and school-based education programming, mentoring, labour market and law enforcement initiatives is required to address the unequal relationships and opportunities that face Hmong adolescent girls.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
CM	Community Mapping
DFID	Department for International Development (U.K.)
DoLISA	Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (Viet Nam)
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council (U.K.)
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender based violence
GP	Intergenerational pairing
GSO	General Statistics Office (Viet Nam)
IDI	In-depth interviews
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFGS	Institute for Family and Gender Studies
ISDS	Institute for Social Development Studies
INGO	International nongovernmental organisations
KI	Key informant
KII	Key informant interviews
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MICS	Multiple indicator cluster survey
MN	Marital networks
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training (Viet Nam)
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
OCS	Outlier case studies
SAVY	Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth
SDG	Small group discussions

SRH	Sexual reproductive health
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VND	Vietnamese Dong

Executive summary

Overview and report aims

Viet Nam, according to the World Bank (2013), has already met five of its ten Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) targets and is on track to meet two more before the 2015 deadline. It has more than halved its rates of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1), achieved universal primary education (MDG2) and closed the gender gap in education (MDG3). Indeed, Viet Nam is a regional leader in terms of girls' education and women's participation in both the labour force and politics (MDG3). It has also made huge strides towards meeting MDG5—improving maternal health.

These impressive national statistics nonetheless mask significant gaps between the overall averages and the situation for the country's ethnic minorities. This is particularly true for the Hmong, who, with a population of over 1 million, are one of Viet Nam's largest ethnic groups. They continue not only to suffer from poverty rates as high as 80%, but to have the lowest average age of marriage and a fertility rate in excess of double the national average. They are also the only ethnic group with a primary school gender gap greater than 10% and a high school enrolment rate in single digits. Exacerbating these disadvantages, Hmong adolescent girls face deeply entrenched gender norms that limit their social value as adults to their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Situated at the crossroads of childhood and adulthood, adolescence is increasingly recognized by development agencies (e.g. UNICEF, DFID, USAID, etc.) as a vital stage in the consolidation of the health and educational gains made in childhood—and in the preparation for adult roles. Adolescent girls in particular, as the future mothers of the next generation, offer a unique opportunity for a double return on investment – the future well-being of their children, as well as their own. However, the very concept of adolescence as a crucial stage in a girl's life-cycle is relatively new in Viet Nam in general – and among the Hmong in particular.

Largely isolated - geographically by their mountains and socially by their cultural distinctiveness - it is difficult for Hmong adolescents and their parents to imagine a shift in the gender traditions of their ethnic group, even as they become aware that their reality is markedly different from the broader Vietnamese culture. Indeed, as change unfolds, with Hmong children beginning to complete lower-secondary school en masse, for example, the pervasiveness of Hmong cultural norms often results in unintended – and surprising – consequences. Similarly, the impact of individual agency does not appear to be clear-cut; girls who are leading the way on one front are often quite traditional on others, even to their own detriment.

This report draws on research from in-depth qualitative fieldwork undertaken in 2013 in Ha Giang province, northern Viet Nam, on what drives the shifting and persisting norms surrounding marriage practices--and marriage-education trade-offs--for girls within the Hmong community. It looks at how these norms are shaped by individual agency, socio-economic conditions, demographic factors as well cultural and political institutions and the impacts they have on girls' capacities in terms of education, economics, decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and physical well-being. The report concludes with a brief reflection on the policy and programming implications for the Government of Viet Nam and its development partners as well as for non-governmental organisations, given the growing recognition that progress towards the MDGs must be measured not just in terms of national averages but in terms of meaningful change for all social groups.

Study sample and methodology

This study is part of a broader multi-country (Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda, Viet Nam), multi-year initiative funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on gender justice for adolescent girls. In the first year, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), in partnership with national researchers (the Institute of Family and Gender Studies in Viet Nam), investigated Hmong girls' vulnerabilities in terms of education, economics, physical and reproductive health, psychosocial well-being and participation. It found that despite nascent shifts, adolescent girls continued to lack the same opportunities as boys and were, in particular, very unlikely to progress on to upper secondary school, undertake paid employment or have a voice within the home or community. It also found that Hmong girls were most often socially isolated, in part because of the excessive work demanded of them by their families, largely ignorant about puberty and reproduction and regularly forced to witness the alcohol-fuelled abuse of their mothers by their fathers. In this second year, the research used a common set of qualitative tools—adapted by country research teams to the local context--to examine the way in which marriage practices and related social norms intersect with educational practices to limit girls' futures.

Our primary research took place in Ta Lung commune, in the Meo Vac district of Ha Giang province, near Viet Nam's border with China. The district, which is best characterised as a mountain desert given its extreme lack of rainfall, is recognised as the country's Hmong homeland and is one of the poorest areas in the province. Over the past two decades, Ta Lung commune, which consists of eight villages—some more centrally located and others quite remote-- has received various forms of support from national poverty-alleviation programmes. However, the bulk of this programming appears to be tapering off as the Government, driven by cost-savings measures, shifts from targeting all Hmong families to only those who fall below an extremely low poverty threshold.

Key findings vis-à-vis marriage practices

A variety of Hmong marriage practices continue to disproportionately burden girls—both in terms of getting married and within the institution of marriage. Our study participants were in agreement that while some practices are shifting rapidly, others are more stubbornly entrenched.

Getting married: Although study participants were clear that marriages are no longer arranged, the only consensus they could come to about the typical age at which girls marry is that the law stipulates 18 (and 20 for boys). Some study participants were of the view that girls today are marrying later than in the past, primarily because traditional arranged child marriages have now died out. Others, however, noted that girls are marrying earlier, largely because they have more contact with boys now that they are in school and are not confined so strictly to the home. Triangulating the beliefs of our study participants with the actual ages of the married partners in the families of our study participants, it seems that while most girls marry between the ages of 18 and 20, a significant proportion marry at 17 - and a small minority continue to marry against their will as early as 14.

Furthermore, although there is consensus that parents no longer choose their children's partners, this does not necessarily mean that the bride and groom choose each other—at least initially. It remains unacceptable in the Hmong community for a girl to show any interest in a boy until he has actively pursued her for some time. Moreover, while boys are far less likely to kidnap their brides today than they were in the past, the youngest brides were far more likely to report that they had been forcibly married.

Hmong tradition in Meo Vac stipulates that once a girl has spent three days in a boy's house she is married to him. Kidnapped girls told us that they saw no way around this tradition. Girls' parents rarely have the chance to intervene as they often only find out about the 'marriage' after it has happened. Even boys' parents, who are culpable in that they are typically asked for permission before a kidnapping, feel relatively powerless in the face of their sons' desires due to the threat of suicide if the girl they 'love' is allowed to leave.

Being married: The majority of Hmong girls marry voluntarily during late adolescence. Even these girls, however, find that their capacities and opportunities are limited sharply and abruptly by traditional marriage practices. Community consensus regarding what makes a 'good wife' or a 'good husband' explains much about why this is so — a good wife is defined primarily in terms of the work she does for her husband and in-laws while

a good husband is merely a man who avoids the worst vices. Young wives are often all too aware that marriage brings to an end any possibility of an independent life.

The lives of married Hmong women are also defined in terms of fertility. Girls are expected to have children quickly – and many are expected to continue childbearing until they have produced at least one boy. The end result is that while Viet Nam's overall birth-rate is hovering around replacement level (i.e. two children per woman), Hmong families continue to be much larger.

Pervasive gender-based violence also continues to threaten the well-being of Hmong wives. Girls not only *expect* their husbands to be violent, they often see the violence as their own fault and as something to be borne in private.

Key findings vis-à-vis changing community norms

Hmong girls, particularly those in the most remote rural hamlets, are located in a rather singular nexus in terms of norm stability and change. On the one hand, they are growing up in an isolated, unique cultural environment that works to maintain social norms. On the other hand, because Viet Nam is a one-party state, there is considerable scope for top-down change that has the potential to shift actions, if not norms and attitudes, rapidly. This combination has resulted in significant, uneven and sometimes surprising shifts in gendered social norms.

Drivers of change: Study participants noted that legal changes that outlaw child marriage have had some impact on the age of marriage, though enforcement is uneven, with some communes not collecting fines. On the other hand, heavy community messaging about the advantages of later marriage, specifically that older girls are better able to handle the workload of marriage and bear healthier babies, appear to be well understood.

The uptake of education is also driving changes in norms – though the impact of those changes may be less clear cut and positive than initially hoped. The good news is that the overwhelming pattern is that all children, girls and boys, now complete 9th grade – exactly as the law requires – with many girls now aspiring to higher education. This is a remarkable transition and is due to a confluence of well thought-out policy. First, schooling has been, until this year, free for all children in the commune. Second, fines have been imposed on parents who do not send their children to school. Finally, the commune has carefully crafted messages, convincing parents that only the irresponsible fail to educate their children. The evidence of genuine norm change in regard to the value of education was confirmed by adolescents, all of whom reported that education was the key to a better, less poor, future.

The less positive news is that while keeping children in school until they complete 9th grade also keeps the vast majority of the youngest adolescents from getting married, there is some evidence that school's mixed classrooms are facilitating the marriage of 16- and 17-year-olds. Because girls and boys are, for the first time, spending considerable time in one another's company – and because marriage amongst the Hmong is a contract easily and quickly made – adults are worried that adolescents are choosing to marry as soon as they finish 9th grade.

Within the past five years, even the most remote Hmong communities have become less socially and geographically isolated. All villages in our study area now have both electricity and mobile phone services and are benefiting from improved footpaths that make it easier to reach not just the centre of the commune, but other communes.

However, this growing engagement with the outside world is also contributing to uneven shifts in norms. On the one hand, better ties to markets mean increasing opportunities for wage labour among the Hmong, even for girls, who often sell wine and vegetables to make money to buy their own clothes. Similarly, TV is showing girls a world very different from their own.

On the other hand, most girls are watching romantic dramas, which may well build up unrealistic expectations of married life, and mobile phones are giving them previously unheard of levels of contact with boys. Additionally, better roads are giving them more access to the markets that serve as both the hub of Hmong social life and a venue for kidnappings.

Hmong role models are also encouraging change. A handful of families, for example, have invested in upper secondary education for their daughters. They not only demonstrate that education is attainable, but as their children take on wage labour and are appointed to official positions, they also model a way out of the hardships inherent in subsistence farming.

Maintainers of stasis: The reality of Hmong agrarian life plays a key role in maintaining gender norms and marriage practices. Jobs are nearly non-existent outside the informal economy in the highlands, and farming, which continues to be very hard work, requires the labour of as many young people as possible.

Hmong culture, shaped by this agrarian reality, continues to be the strongest supporter of the status quo –slowing norm change even in the face of top-down legal change. For example, an entrenched preference for sons continues to mould the lives of girls even before they are born: the largest and poorest families tend to be those who have the most daughters as parents pursue their quest for sons. Because sons not only ultimately provide old-age care for their parents, but are also vital to Hmong spiritual traditions, they are prioritised for education and allocated fewer domestic chores—allowing them time in childhood for play. Girls, on the other hand, are destined to become members of their husbands' families, both physically and spiritually. As a result, they not only receive a smaller share of family resources (education, leisure time and inheritance), but their lives are also more circumscribed during the crucial developmental stages of childhood and adolescence by obligations of filial piety.

Hmong girls and women are also acutely aware of the social pressures that encourage conformity with traditional norms and practices. They value social recognition as diligent, hardworking daughters. They understand that non-marital relationships are strictly taboo and they are worried that they will be seen as divorced, and totally unmarriageable, if they attempt to walk away from a kidnapping. They are also afraid of community stigma if they marry too late – or speak out against gender based violence.

Policy and programming implications

The persistence of discriminatory gender norms continues to place severe restrictions on the lives of Hmong girls and women. Few have the opportunity to complete secondary school and most are too trapped by their domestic responsibilities to take on the roles in the larger community that might promote more equitable decision-making at home. Traditional marriage practices continue to reinforce the gender inequality that permeates the Hmong culture and limits girls' options.

Given the remarkably 'sticky' nature of gender norms – and the ways in which change is working, in some cases, to actually reinforce traditional marriage patterns – it is vital that policy and programming be tailored with care to reflect Hmong realities. Based on our study participants' stories, our research suggests that the following policy and programming priorities need to be considered if MDG achievement for all – including the most disadvantaged adolescent girls – is to become a reality.

Ensure continued and expanded support to attend school. There has been a remarkably fast and thorough educational transition in Ta Lung to seeing the completion of 9th grade as the new 'normal'. That said, this transition is at grave risk, according to key informants, with the Government's new educational policy, which has taken fee waivers away from Hmong children who are not officially 'poor'. Given that the poverty line in Viet Nam is extremely low by international standards[1], and that the line that separates poor and non-poor households is all but invisible in northern Ha Giang province, commune leaders are concerned that their hard-won efforts to get all children into school will soon be unravelled. Allowing this this to happen would be short-sighted, given that educating today's adolescent girls has the potential to snowball throughout the Hmong community – particularly if paired with a policy to hire them back to teach the next generation of Hmong students. Girls, unlike boys, very often expressed a strong desire to attend secondary school and listed the financial and opportunity costs to their parents as key barriers.

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1 The official poverty line in Viet Nam is different for urban and rural areas. The former is currently 500,000 VND person/month (equivalent to $1.61/day) and the latter is 400,000 VND/person/month (equivalent to $1.29/day). These figures are sharply lower than the GSO-WB poverty line, which more accurately reflects both improvements in the reference food basket and increased consumer spending and sets the poverty line at 653,000 VND person/month (equivalent to $2.26/person) (World Bank, 2012b).

Incentivise and monitor better enforcement of national laws on the age of marriage. Because Hmong marriages are often contracted by the simple expediency of moving in with one another – fines for under-aged marriage are rarely issued and young couples can easily avoid detection by simply not applying for a marriage certificate until they reach legal age. Given, however, that young couples universally live with the husband's parents--and the sensitivity of Hmong parents to educational fines, it seems likely that marriage fines may help reduce the number of early marriages if they are universally enforced and large enough to be meaningful.

Invest in employment opportunities that could capitalise on Hmong uniqueness and skills. It is difficult to step outside a culture based so robustly on agrarian realities. However, it may be wise for the Government to invest more heavily in the infrastructure and advertising that could bring more opportunities – and cash – to Hmong communities. This could include environmental and cultural tourism initiatives. It will be critical to ensure, via prioritising training and loans, that these opportunities accrue to Hmong entrepreneurs, rather than local Kinh households – and that they include women.

Consider affirmative action measures. Given that Hmong families believe that they lack the financial and social resources with which to translate their own educational investments into longer-term economic success via positions with the state sector, the Government should invest heavily in ensuring the emergence of Hmong 'trend setters' who can establish clear links in the minds of other Hmong families between education and economic success—thereby forging a path for next generation. This will require supporting Hmong political candidates not only in villages, but also in district and provincial governments, and strengthening the position and mandate of the national level Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. The Government might look for example to India's experience with quotas for marginalised caste groups.

Encourage progressive role models for adolescents. Role models - beyond the movie stars they watch on TV – could play a key role in shaping more progressive gender norms. Key informants noted that the more remote hamlets have never sent a girl to secondary school or proposed a candidate, male or female, for commune office. While girls noted that their non-Hmong teachers are inspirational, most adolescents are unable to conceive that – as Hmong – their own lives could differ significantly from those of their parents. Initiatives could include educational programming, visits to university campuses in urban centres and girls clubs where role models could be invited to talk.

Discourage early marriage and prevent pre-marital pregnancies by investing in sexual and reproductive health education and contraception for unmarried young people. Girls and boys have far more opportunities to interact with one another than their parents did at the same age; they do not, however, before marriage have access to any more sexual or reproductive health (SRH) information, as pre-marital sexual activity is strictly taboo and even adolescents believe that it would be inappropriate for them to understand the nature of marital relations. Given that the only solution, so far, is for parents to allow their children to marry at too young an age, better SRH information seems advisable, including written materials in the Hmong language that unmarried adolescents can read in private.

Promote educational programming in schools and communities to eliminate marriage by abduction. Boys need to hear that 'kidnapping' is never an acceptable way to find a wife, with messages emphasising that happier wives – older girls who can make their own choices – ultimately mean happier husbands. Boys' parents need incentives to be steered away from condoning kidnappings, most successful would likely be fines imposed by hamlet or commune authorities. Girls (through schools) and their parents (through mass organisations such as the Women's Union) need to be made aware that they need not be voiceless victims and that an unwanted marriage is always an illegal marriage—and that it need not limit their future marriageability.

Address gender-based violence by supporting victims and encouraging new masculinities. Given the pervasiveness of drunken violence and the shame felt by women who are caught in its web, it is vital that the Women's Union and other mass organisations address more directly what girls and young women can do to keep themselves safe. It is also vital that men and boys learn about new forms and practices of masculinity, through awareness-raising and education initiatives led by professionals who have experience in working sensitively with boys and men. Given the concerns of the Women's Union KIs, who correctly noted that cash fines negatively impact both the perpetrators and the victims of GBV, we suggest modelling punishments on the successful public labour fines which are handed out to the fathers of truants.

1 Introduction

Picture 1: Ha Giang terrain

Viet Nam, according to the World Bank, has already met five of its ten Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is on track to meet two more before the 2015 deadline.[2] It has, for example, already more than halved its rates of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1), achieved universal primary education (MDG2) and closed the gender gap in education (MDG3). Indeed, Viet Nam is a regional leader in terms of girls' education and women's participation in both the labour force and politics (MDG3). It has also made huge strides towards meeting MDG5—improving maternal health.

Critical gaps remain, however, with national progress masking the disparities between overall averages and the situation among the country's ethnic minorities. This is particularly true for the Hmong, who, with a population of just over 1 million, are one of Viet Nam's largest ethnic minorities. They continue not only to suffer from poverty rates as high as 80%, but to have the lowest average age of marriage and a fertility rate more than double the national average. They are also the only ethnic group with a primary gender gap in excess of 10% and a high school enrolment rate in single digits. Hmong adolescent girls face deeply entrenched gender norms that limit their perceived social value to their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Situated at the crossroads of childhood and adulthood, there is a growing recognition of adolescence as a vital stage in the consolidation of any development gains made in childhood in terms of nutrition, education and health. Adolescent girls in particular, as the future mothers of the next generation, offer a unique opportunity for a double return on investment – the future well-being of their children, as well as themselves. However, the very concept of adolescence as a crucial stage in a girl's life-cycle is relatively new in Viet Nam in general – and among the Hmong in particular.

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2 Viet Nam's poverty rate dropped from nearly 60% in the early 1990s to just over 20% in 2010 (using the World Bank's poverty line) (World Bank, 2012b). As of 2012, nearly half of its labour force is female, as are one quarter of its National Assembly—and girls are significantly more likely than boys to attend high school (UN, 2012).

Largely isolated, geographically by their mountains, and socially by their cultural distinctiveness, it is difficult for adolescents and their parents—particularly those in more rural hamlets--to imagine a shift in the gender traditions of their ethnic group, even as they become aware that their reality is markedly different from the broader Vietnamese culture. Indeed, there is evidence that shifting and persisting norms are heavily intertwined with traditional Hmong culture introducing unintended – and surprising – consequences. Similarly, the impact of individual agency does not appear to be clear-cut; girls who are leading the way on one front are often quite traditional on others, even to their own detriment.

This report draws on research from in-depth qualitative fieldwork undertaken in 2013 in Ha Giang province, northern Viet Nam, on what drives the shifting and persisting norms surrounding marriage practices within the Hmong community – and how these impact adolescent girls' education and other capabilities. It begins by laying out the conceptual framework, which is similar across all four countries involved in the multi-country DFID-funded Adolescent Girls and Social Norms project[3]. It then introduces the Vietnamese governance structure, which is highly distinctive, the broader Hmong culture, which continues to colour all aspects of girls' lives, and the current situation for Vietnamese girls vis-à-vis practices surrounding marriage, fertility, and education, amongst others. Where possible, when discussing girls' realities, we draw on existent literature to include specific information about the Hmong experience – though we are also mindful of significant data gaps. We then briefly outline the study sites, sample, methodology and research tools and provide an overview of the Ha Giang provincial context. Our primary research findings are presented in Sections 6 and 7. Integrating information from adolescent girls, their families and the leaders in their communities, we address the ways in which marriage practices and gender norms are impinging upon girls' education and limiting their futures. We then explore how social institutions and agency interact with modernity to both maintain existing gender norms – and encourage evolution. Building on our study participants' lived realities, the report concludes with a discussion of policy and programming implications that may serve to expand girls' horizons.

1.1 Conceptual framework[4]

The conceptual framework for year 1 research was informed by the capabilities approach to development and underpinned by current thinking around gender justice and entitlements (Sen, 1992). As reflections on the findings of year 1 research have progressed, the conceptual framework has also evolved. The current framework (see Figure 1, which has been specifically adapted to the Hmong context) illustrates how both the drivers of positive change in social norms and forces maintaining discriminatory gender norms may be mediated by a variety of factors, operating through a variety of institutions and sites to ultimately affect adolescent girls' capability domains.

The figure below illustrates some of the main forces, both structural and social-psychological, that underpin the gender norms that impact girls' capabilities. On the left, in the blue sphere, are forces that contribute to change in gender norms; on the right, in the orange sphere, are those that contribute to the maintenance of discriminatory gender norms. In Viet Nam, for example, legal changes and state sponsored social messaging have been critical to effecting change, while age-old customs such as patrilocal residence patterns and filial piety continue to slow it. Some forces – such as education or the media/technology – can both promote change and help entrench discriminatory norms; they thus appear in both clusters of forces. This is important for the overall conceptualisation of change and persistence, as our research findings strongly support the perspective that norm change is messy and contested.

Norms – and processes of change or stasis – affect agency and what individuals actually do. Agency is also affected by a myriad of factors, which mediate the effects of gender norms on behaviour; selected influences are shown in red on the diagram below. Both norms and adolescent girls' agency operate through a range of institutional sites, illustrated by the turquoise ovals, and affect the ultimate outcomes – adolescent girls'

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[3] This multi-year study is aimed at gender justice for adolescent girls. The programme examines four countries: Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda and Viet Nam. ODI, in partnership with national researchers, is exploring the key capabilities that shape girls' current well-being and future potential. Focusing on economic, educational, physical, psycho-emotional and civic participation capabilities, it shines a light on discriminatory social norms, making visible the often hidden experiences of adolescent girls and identifying how policy and programme actors can better respond to their needs and priorities.

[4] This section draws heavily on the year two Uganda report (Bantebya et al., 2014).

capabilities (indicated in green). Feedback arrows indicate that these are not one-way processes – girls' capabilities affect their agency and thus their capacity to challenge discriminatory norms.

The following are some of the key messages and issues identified from a review of literature on social norms and norms change (Marcus 2014) that have particular relevance for our study:

- No single theoretical perspective on norm maintenance and change fully captures the processes and range of factors that hold gender norms in place or underpin change in particular situations. It is productive to combine insights from analysis of structural processes that facilitate norm change, studies of social convention and conformity, and analysis of agency and resistance (e.g. Bicchieri, 2013; Schuler, 2008; Beaman et al., 2012; Shahnaz and Karim, 2008; Boyden et al., 2012; Gage, 2009).
- Social norms are part of the way in which gendered power inequalities are maintained. Analysis of these power inequalities is thus vital for understanding the varying capacities across groups to challenge norms (e.g. Bicchieri, 2013; Ball Cooper and Fletcher, 2012; DFID and Girl Hub, 2012; Mackie and Le Jeune, 2009; Barker, 2000; Barker et al., 2007; WHO, 2009).
- Processes of norm change can be rapid and abrupt or incremental and unnoticed, or somewhere in between. Such processes are often complex, messy and non-linear (Boudet et al., 2012; Calder, 2012; Rao, 2012).
- While the key drivers of change are specific to particular socio-cultural contexts and gender norms, an emerging consensus indicates that increasing levels of education and the growth in economic opportunities for young women have played a particularly important role in changing gender relations, and frequently in changing norms (e.g. Hossain, 2011; Jensen, 2010; Das, 2008; ICRW, 2005; UNFPA and MenEngage, n.d).

Figure 1: **Conceptual framework (Adapted from Marcus, 2014)**
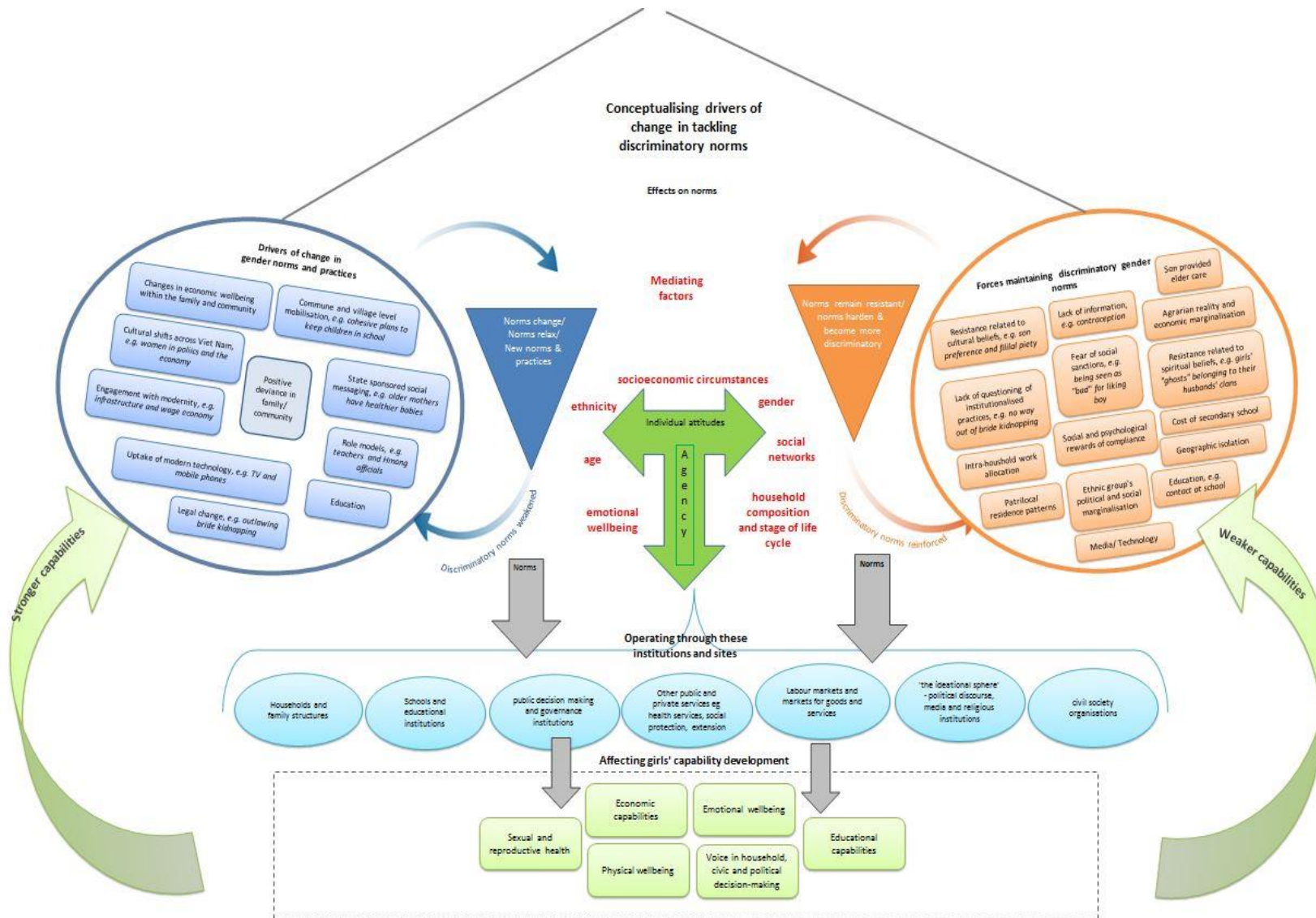
- In some cases as a response to changing social norms and to activist pressure, and in some cases as a response to leadership by an elite group, legal change can also drive changes in gender norms and in wellbeing outcomes for women and girls. Enforcement of gender equality laws can stimulate and reinforce compliance with expected behaviour that underpins and feeds into norm change.
- The vast majority of the world's population lives in contexts affected by large-scale structural changes such as globalisation, increasing access to education, and the rapid spread of communications technology, which can affect gender norms profoundly. While in the main, these are leading to more egalitarian gender norms, these changes can evoke resistance movements asserting discriminatory gender norms.
- The role of the multiple potential drivers of norm change is mediated in any given context by the broader cultural and ideational (including religious/spiritual) context from which social norms governing gendered behaviour derive; the strength with which norms are held in any particular reference group; individual views (which do not necessarily accord with social norms); and socioeconomic factors that facilitate or limit individuals' and households' room for manoeuvre. Thus, even in a context where expansion of affordable secondary education, structural change in the economy and new normative and empirical expectations concerning sending daughters to secondary school are in place, an individual household may be unable to comply with norms because of poverty or labour constraints.
- Since gender norms reflect deep social structures, it is rarely only social conventions that hold discriminatory norms in place: gender norms also reflect moral codes, religious codes and cultural values, and the social and economic interests of specific groups, encapsulated in specific gender ideologies. Where there is more than one set of factors holding a norm in place, change in one area only (e.g. social convention) is likely to be insufficient, and addressing all determining factors may be necessary.
- Social norms are often held in place by a number of factors simultaneously; likewise, change may be driven by multiple factors occurring at the same time, which may be operating on different levels. Thus, for example, structural forces of change or stasis set the context in which psychological processes promoting or undermining change take place. Analytically and practically, it is vital to disentangle the different processes that are taking place simultaneously.
- Both empirical analysis of the processes of norm change in particular contexts and a more theoretical literature identify role models as critical to catalysing norm change processes. Role models may persuade people to adopt new norms; they also influence norms that less powerful or lower-status people are inclined to imitate. Role models may be community leaders, religious figures or celebrities such as music or sports stars, but they may also be other girls or adults who challenge particular norms, or who have done so in the past and can be seen as living proof that new norms can lead to positive outcomes.
- It is increasingly recognised that adolescent girls, just like adult women, do not all accept the gender *status quo*. As interest in girls' empowerment has grown, so has understanding of the ways in which girls already influence decisions about their own futures, those of their younger siblings and, in the case of married girls and young women, the areas in which they have decision-making power in relation to their children.

The table below summarises the factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of social norm change.

Table 1: Conditions in which gender norms are most likely to change

More likely to change when	*Less likely to change when*
No parties have strong economic interests at stake (e.g. stand to lose from change, or to gain from continuation of old norms) or parties have a strong economic interest in changing	There are strong economic interests in continuation of a practice
No one's power is directly threatened by change	Certain groups perceive their power and status to be directly undermined by change
One key factor underpins a norm	A norm is underpinned by multiple causal factors (over-determined)
There are no religious injunctions to continue a certain practice	There are religious injunctions in favour of a particular practice
A critical mass of others have already changed their practices	Very few others have changed practice
Role models and opinion leaders (including religious leaders) promote changed norms	Role models and opinion leaders (including religious leaders) promote the *status quo* or more inegalitarian norms
A changing institutional or political context provides opportunities for changed practices	The institutional or political environment is resistant to change
Norm change communications are paired with opportunities for action	It is unclear to people how they would implement new norm

Source: Marcus 2014

Changing gender norms and relations can evoke both hidden and overt resistance, sometimes involving political mobilisation against gender equality. Resistance to more egalitarian gender norms may be motivated by perceived challenges to an individual's or group's power, status or economic interests, by ideational factors, such as a perception that traditional values or religious traditions are under attack, or by both simultaneously. Injunctive gender norms (views about what people *should* do in a given society) are often different from, and may change at different paces or directions from, descriptive norms (what most people are actually *doing*); reference groups holding these norms may differ, depending on the norm. Some norms have been identified as particularly 'sticky' and resistant to change – normally those upheld by powerful vested interests or held in place by a multiplicity of factors.

2 Methodological approach

This study is part of a broader multi-country (Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda, Viet Nam), multi-year initiative funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on gender justice for adolescent girls. In the first year of research we explored the ways in which gender and ethnicity combined to limit the capacities of Hmong girls. We found that girls' lives in most ways mirrored those of their mothers and were defined by domestic responsibilities that prevented them from fully engaging with their schooling, kept them confined at home and isolated them from both social support and the broader stores of knowledge that are helping their Kinh peers transition to a more independent womanhood. In this second year, the Overseas Development Institute, in partnership with national researchers (the Institute of Family and Gender Studies in Viet Nam), used a common set of research tools that is adapted to the local context to examine the way in which marriage practices and related social norms limit girls' futures.

Research ethics approval processes, including child protection guidelines, were adhered to both nationally and internationally, with the overarching research proposal undergoing scrutiny by the ODI research ethics board, which follows the principles laid out in the 2012 UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics.

2.1 Instruments

Drawing on a purposively selected sample from two villages, both more remote than the ones in which we worked last year, we used a variety of qualitative and participatory research instruments, including body mapping, rankings, timelines and family drawings, to explore the ways in which gender norms and marriage practices continue to limit the lives of Hmong adolescent girls. Small group discussions with adolescents (SGDs) and focus group discussions with adults (FGDs), in single-sex and mixed settings, allowed us to explore common views and experiences on marriage, gender, adolescence and social norms – and not only how these persist but also how they can be changed. In-depth interviews (IDIs), including younger and older adolescent girls and their brothers, revealed their views on the status of girls and the opportunities and challenges they face in their natal homes, their marital homes and in the wider community. We used intergenerational pairings (involving grandparents, parents and adolescents) (GPs) and marital networks (MNs) to explore changes in marriage and gender roles over time and outlier case studies (OCSs) to examine in detail how some girls break the mould while others live lives that more resemble those of their grandmothers than those of their peers. Key informant interviews, with community leaders and service providers (KIs), provided not only a lens into available programming—but also an insider-outsider look at community need vis-à-vis adolescent girls. An overview is presented in Table 2; details are represented in the Appendices.
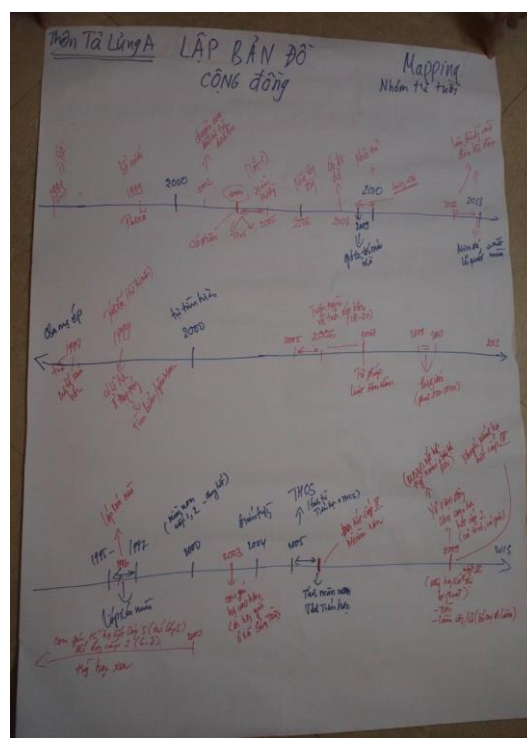
Picture 1: Community timeline

Table 2: Instrument type, purpose and sample

Instrument	Purpose	Number Groups/ (Individuals)
Community mappings (CMs)	To explore general community-level views about the norms surrounding girls education and marriage; to develop a community timeline in regard to service provision and infrastructure development.	3 (14)
Focus group discussions (FGDs)	To explore general community-level beliefs, with adults, in single sex and mixed-sex settings, about masculinity and femininity, marriage and fertility and education—and their intersections.	6 (27)
Small group discussions (SGDs)	To explore general community-level beliefs, with adolescents, in single sex and mixed-sex settings, about masculinity and femininity, marriage and fertility and education—and their intersections.	3 (13)
In-depth interviews (IDIs)	To explore, with the unmarried adolescent brothers of adolescent girls, views on masculinity and femininity and how they relate to past and current practices surrounding schooling and marriage.	8
Marital networks (MNs)	To explore, with young married couples and their parents, views on marriage, childbearing and decision-making.	2 (10)
Outlier case studies (OCSs)	To explore the unique situations of girls who are either positive deviants in their communities or whose lives have been tightly constrained by traditional norms and practices.	10
Inter-generational pairings (GPs)	To triangulate, across three generations of the same family where possible and two where not, how marriage and education are changing—and staying the same.	9 (22)
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	To find out about local marriage practices and girls' education—and how they interact with one another; to ascertain the types and levels of programming available.	8
TOTAL interactions	• Groups/families • Individuals	49 112

The research was designed by a research fellow at ODI in consultation with senior researchers from the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (IFGS). Data collection was carried out for two weeks in October 2013 by those researchers in conjunction with a small team of local translators. The team lead and one member of the field team participated in a design workshop in London and then there was a follow up training in Ha Noi for the rest of the research team. Drawing on previous contacts with the Ha Giang province DoLISA, we were able to secure official permission to undertake the research, which was critical given that the research site is in a sensitive frontier area.

At the analysis stage, the research team lead, together with an ODI team consisting of a research fellow and a research consultant, was involved. While the Vietnamese language transcripts were being translated into English, the ODI team developed an initial coding matrix based on the conceptual framework. That matrix was further developed after an initial read of all transcripts, in order to capture context specificity, and then transcripts were re-read and coded. The coding matrix can be found in the Appendices.

2.2 Caveats

It is important to bear in mind a number of caveats regarding our data. First, Ha Giang is a frontier state, given its shared border with China (with which the Vietnamese government has a tense relationship). This brings heightened security and surveillance measures and, as noted by Turner (2010), no doubt makes information sharing and open discussions at all levels more challenging. This was certainly made clear by the way in which our study participants often told us first what they knew they ought to be telling us—only then telling us what they perceived to be true.

Second, communication barriers were significant. Many of the adults, particularly women, spoke no Vietnamese (the native language of the research team), and most study participants were shy about sharing their experiences and views. While local translators were helpful in terms of both language itself and in terms making study participants feel more secure, overall it appeared difficult for study participants to articulate their views on cultural practices. Conversations often flowed less smoothly than anticipated.

Third, there are striking differences between our current findings--and both our year one research and some of the longer-term ethnographies. For example, marriage by abduction was very rare in the villages in which we worked last year. Most study participants had heard of marital kidnappings—but did not personally know anyone who had been abducted. This was not the case in this year's more remote villages. Furthermore, Lemoine (2012), who has spent more than five decades closely studying the Hmong, claims that '(H)mong society in the traditional village environment has a permissive attitude to sexual freedom as soon as a young girl becomes nubile generally around 13' (3). We not only did not find that to be the case in our research, but found the opposite to be true. Pre-marital sex, '*without the chicken ritual*' (see discussion

Picture 2: Women's FGD in Ta Lung Commune

below), was considered deeply shameful by our study participants. Given that the larger literature emphasizes cultural cohesion (e.g. Long, 2008; Ngo, 2011), differences such as these are difficult to explain except by noting that the marriage of barely pubescent girls is now as rare as it once was common – meaning that today's girls have years of unmarried adolescence during which they *could* engage in premarital sex, whereas their grandmothers did not.

Finally, we have tried to protect the privacy of our study participants. We have not identified the particular villages in which we worked and, in the case of OCSs, have deliberately blurred some details and omitted others (including their real names). While this risks reducing the power of study participants' stories, we judged their anonymity more important.

3 Setting the stage: Locating Hmong girls' realities in their political and social contexts[5]

Hmong girls are located in a rather singular nexus. They live in a country with a one-party state that controls not only the law—but social messaging. Additionally, and also unusually, Hmong girls are growing up in an isolated and insular culture that not only limits their contact with the broader Vietnamese culture, but in many cases totally precludes it. Indeed, in the case of Hmong girls, that broader culture, which has experienced recent rapid change brought on by the grafting of economic development onto traditional Confucian culture, is largely observed—through teachers and officials rather than experienced directly.

One-party state

Vietnamese culture

Hmong culture

Hmong girls
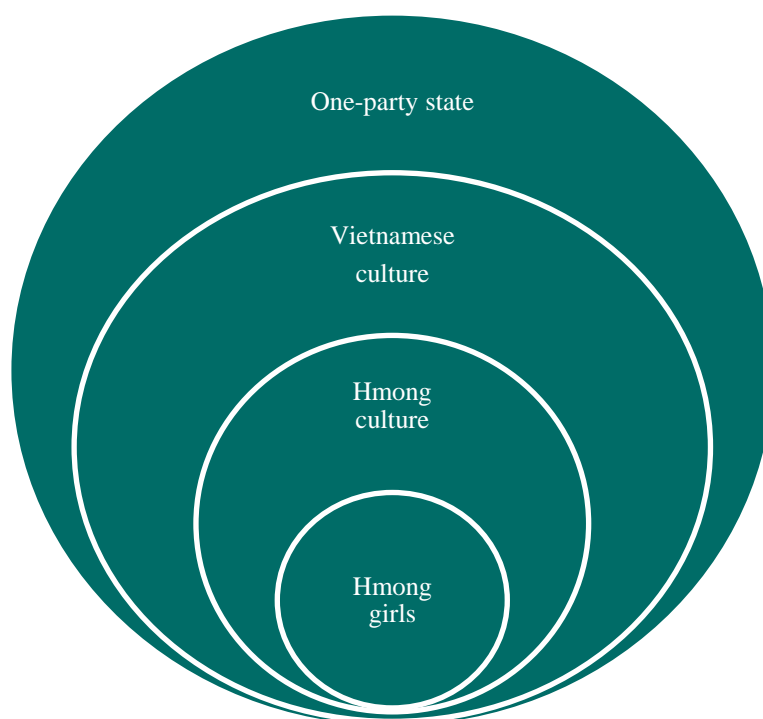
5 For more detail, please see the Year 1 report (Jones et al., 2013).

3.1 The Vietnamese political context

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam is a one-party state, led by the Vietnamese Communist Party, which, despite economic liberalisation and increasing decentralisation retains tight national control over a wide variety of policy areas (Fritzen, 2006) – albeit with increasing input from INGOs, UN agencies and donors. There are four layers of government in Viet Nam: central, provincial, district and commune. While the Communist Party has the overall leadership role at all levels, the party itself is 'functionally pluralist', which on the one hand offers more space for decentralisation than may be immediately obvious and the other hand leads to a certain fragility of power that often causes an overinvestment in maintaining credibility (Nguyen-Hoang and Schroeder, 2010).

Box 1: Viet Nam's mass organisations

Mass organisations, including the Women's Union and the Youth Union, were established in the last 1920s and early 1930s by the Communist Party as 'the people's front' in the pursuit of independence from French colonisation. The traditional function has been to mobilise citizens for various activities aiming to 'protect, construct and develop' the nation with a heavy focus on creating loyal citizens and cohesive communities. In recent years, they have implemented many development-oriented activities to improve the health, economic and social wellbeing of their members and have provided supplemental public services that the government does not provide (e.g. housing loans, microcredit for the poor, youth employment support, nutritional awareness classes for parents, intervening in the case of domestic violence disputes). They remain, however, very closely connected to the government, with cadres having public servant status, receiving salaries from the national treasury. Moreover, while there are nominal membership fees, most activities are state funded. Mass organisations usually have a four-layered organisational structure from central, provincial, district to commune level in order to effectively transmit decisions and instructions made at the central level down to the grassroots. While this structure has distinct advantages, including being well placed to identify households in need based on locally contextualised knowledge, there are significant questions as to whether mass organisations really have the capacity to reflect the priority needs of the poorest and most excluded given the broader hierarchical political culture in which they operate.

Source: Sakata (2005).

Increasing decentralisation has been useful where it allows communes to target policies to their own needs – such as fining the families of truant children to encourage school attendance – but is hardly a panacea for broader development and poverty reduction challenges. Because the state's share of economic output has remained both constant and large (Gainsborough, 2010) and Viet Nam's citizens are represented *de jure*, if not *de facto*, by a plethora of state-sponsored mass organisations such as the Women's Union and the Youth Union, the central government remains monolithic in the minds of many (see Box A above). Policy tends to be top-down, rather than bottom-up, and, once enacted, 'actors involved are then expected to be bound by it' (Harris et al., 2011: viii). This tends not only to leave lower-level authorities in a holding pattern, waiting for proclamations from above, but also to stifle local innovation and targeted responses, particularly in areas where language and cultural barriers make it difficult for local citizens to make their needs known (Jones et al., 2012). For example, while there is, as is discussed in greater detail below, a unified push to encourage families to have no more than two children, there is insufficient attention paid to the diverse drivers of fertility. Similarly, targets for poverty reduction are often set by the central government with inadequate input from local authorities.

Box2: The politics of gender

The Vietnamese government has a longstanding commitment to gender equality – with documents dating to the 1930s proclaiming it a key party objective (Abjorensen, 2010; Knodel et al., 2004). The country's gender machinery is relatively strong and it has a solid regional track record in terms of women's political and economic participation (Jones et al., 2012; ISDS, 2010; Schuler et al., 2006). That said, there is significant space for improvement – in terms of both institutions and the widening gap between women's public and private roles (ISDS, 2010; Abjorensen, 2010). While policies such as the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Family Development Strategy 2012–2020 have promoted domestic equality, even in terms of housework, weak political commitment, low staff skill levels and poor inter-agency coordination have hampered implementation (UN Women in Vietnam, 2012) .The end result is that, 'On an average day, women spend 5.4 hours on housework, while their husbands spend only 1.5 hours.' (ISDS, 2010: 6).

3.2 Hmong culture and history[6]

The Hmong are one of 53 ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam, and one of the poorest — primarily because they overwhelmingly remain subsistence farmers who are able, due to the climate and geography in which they live, to harvest only one crop each year — rather than the three now common in the Mekong Delta. Numbering just over 1 million, according to the 2009 Census, and originating from China nearly 4,000 years ago, there are, after migrations that began less than two centuries ago, significant Hmong populations in the northern mountains of both Viet Nam and Lao PDR (Lee and Pfeifer, 2006; Michaud, 2010; Duffy et al., 2004). Hmong culture, which sees ethnic identity as more important than national borders, has left the majority of these populations living in 'geographical exclusive spaces separated from the Kinh and other minorities' (Luong and Nieke, 2013:7; see also Baulch et al., 2004). It has both insulated them from the larger Kinh culture that moved into their mountains when the government was actively working to shift populations[7] and minimised recent internal migration. It was also historically reinforced by government policies that marginalised ethnic minorities with the most divergent traditions and lifestyles from those of the Kinh majority (Michaud, 2008; 2010; 2011). While the Hmong diaspora, now over three decades old, has forged new ties between rural mountain villages and the international community, Hmong insularity[8] and a preference for 'selective involvement' with modernity, which includes an integration into the larger cash economy that is tenuous at best, account for the persistence of many traditional practices and cultural preferences that still shape Hmong lives on a daily basis (Turner and Michaud, 2009: 54-55; see also Luong, 2013; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Michaud, 2011; Baulch et al., 2004).

3.3 Involvement with the government: yesterday and today

A full overview of Hmong interaction with the government is well beyond the scope of this paper, but there are a variety of comparatively recent events that continue to reverberate loudly today – primarily because they have tended to reinforce Hmong insularity and Kinh beliefs about Hmong 'otherness'. First, during the late 19th century, under French colonial rule, the northern mountains of Viet Nam were under military, rather than civilian, administration, in order to facilitate control of local populations (Michaud, 2010). Second, while upland minorities, including the Hmong, had hoped to secure local governance, this did not eventuate under Communist Party rule. Instead, sedentarisation[9] and collectivisation became official policy with important spill-over effects on Hmong land rights and farming practices (Michaud, 2010; Turner, 2012a).

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6 For more thorough reviews of Hmong history and culture, see Luong and Nieke, 2013 and Duffy et al., 2004. For more wide-ranging exploration, see the Hmong Studies Journal at: http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/

7 In the 1960s the Vietnamese government moved millions of Kinh families to the mountains in part to reduce populations in coastal and urban areas and in part to modernize "backwards" regions.

8 It is important to note that Hmong communities communicate almost exclusively using the Hmong language. Many adults, who have rarely had the opportunity to attend school, speak only Hmong, and children who leave school early, particularly girls, often retreat into a world where Hmong is the only language.

9 The Hmong did not traditionally 'own' land and, as Lemoine (2009) notes, 'freely wandered in the forested mountains' (p.10).

After Doi Moi (the liberalisation of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s), land was returned to the Hmong, but a 'selective cultural preservation policy', which prohibited the 'counter-productive' and 'superstitious practices' of ethnic minorities,[10] was ushered in (Michaud, 2010: 32; see also McElwee, 2004; Messier and Michaud, 2012). Indeed, the state has worked hard to bring the Hmong and other upland minorities into the "modern" Vietnamese fold – fostering a common language, encouraging education and building infrastructure (Turner, 2012a: 543). A plethora of anti-poverty programming, much of which has been specifically ethnically targeted, has been aimed at Hmong communities. Programme 135, for example, has built schools, roads and hospitals. Similarly, Programme 134 has allocated land to and built houses for minority families.

Box 3: Programme 135

Programme 135, which began in 1998 and is currently in phase 3 as a component of the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Programme, has been aimed at improving the quality of life in highly vulnerable, ethnic minority communes—primarily in the northern mountains. Designed to address the root causes of the disproportionately high poverty rates, the programme has had four primary objectives: 1) to improve agricultural production techniques in order to increase income, 2) to develop necessary infrastructure such as electricity, roads, irrigation and schools, 3) to develop the capacity of commune staff and 4) to improve socio-cultural living standards by increasing access to water, sanitation, education and health care (Ha Viet Quan, 2009).

A 2012 end-line survey found that 'P135-II has had positive impacts on several important outcomes of the ethnic minority households, including productive asset ownership, household durables ownership, and rice productivity' (Indochina Research and Consulting, 2012: 11). However, noting that national-level progress has continued to outstrip ethnic minority progress, it concludes that 'the gap between poor and non-poor households in these communes continues to widen' (ibid.: 13).

3.4 Agency

Much is made in the academic literature about Hmong agency (see, e.g., Michaud, 2011; Ngo, 2010; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009). For example, Turner (2012b) notes that, while the Hmong have options, they are in some ways 'rural renegades' (p.415); Michaud (2011) says that they are 'tactically selective about modernity' (p.2). They choose to grow their own varieties of rice[11], because they taste better and are 'traditional', they elect to given birth at home rather than at health clinics, they opt to use shamans rather than physicians, they engage with the cash economy only enough to meet their immediate needs, they prefer to make their own clothing rather than purchase cheaper ready-made substitutes, and they see formal education as fundamentally less useful to their children than learning to do traditional tasks the traditional way. Turner (2012b) concludes that both government and development agencies need to acknowledge that the Hmong are fundamentally happy with their identities and should 'acknowledge different cultural values, necessities, and priorities' (p.417).

While this is true, and we agree that 'policy initiatives based on detailed ethnographic study, a greater understanding of cultural particularities and negotiated participatory approaches' are vital, we caution that the needs of Hmong adolescent girls are not necessarily synonymous with those of the adults in their families and communities—and that even the interests of adults are hardly monolithic (Turner, 2012b: 417). Michaud (2011) notes, for example, that, while adult Hmong in China wish to keep to the old ways, 'youth urgently want to become modern and successful' (p.18). Similarly, Duong (2008) observes – after years of ethnographic research with Hmong girls in Lao Cai – that those who engage in tourism-related activities 'transform themselves' in the process (p.254). As they engage with the larger world around them, their tastes in food and clothing change and they move 'far from the margins' on which they started their lives (ibid.). In order to ensure that Hmong adolescent girls are given the space and support they need to become the women

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10 Acording to Michaud (2010), such practices included 'shamanism (banded sorcery), animal sacrifice, lavish funerals, bride-price and even swiddening' (p.32).
11 In Meo Vac, geography and climate have led to Hmong families growing corn, not rice.

they would like to become, these complex dynamics between a strong central state and a minority community with a rich cultural heritage will need to be carefully negotiated.

3.5 Hmong adolescent girls: what we know now

Hmong girls' day to day lives and capabilities are shaped by a combination of son preference and limited resources—which serve to continually reinforce that preference. In some ways their realities mirror those of their non-Hmong peers. In other ways, however, they are sharply different. Our year-one research found that gender norms surrounding the ideas about what makes a good daughter versus a good son within the Hmong community are key to understanding girls' experiences from early childhood.[12] As they progress through adolescence, girls are pushed more and more to develop the skills and traits they will need to become good wives and mothers – which are, with few exceptions, the only roles open to them. Understanding these norms, which define not only what girls and women do but also what they *ought* to do (Bicchieri, 2006; Heise, 2011), is thus required in order to capture the nuances of girls' lives.

Below, combining our own first year research with that of other academics, we present a brief overview detailing the forces shaping Hmong girls' capabilities. While our year two research is focused on marriage practices and how they impact adolescent girls' lives, this section is organized around childhood development trajectories as they offer the clearest picture of how disadvantage builds on itself over time.

3.5.1 Son preference: shaping lives from birth

While son preference is fundamental to understanding even the broader Kinh culture, and is behind the growing imbalance in Viet Nam's sex ratio[13], in many ways it is a particularly powerful shaper of Hmong girls' lives. Reinforced by patrilocal residence patterns, throughout Vietnam sons are seen as crucial to continue the family line and to provide support in old age; their birth improves the status of their mothers within the family and their fathers within the community (Guilmoto, 2012; Nanda et al., 2012; GSO, 2011; UNFPA, 2011b; ISDS, 2010; Plan International, 2008). Among the Hmong, boys and men maintain 'a monopoly upon religious performances: death rituals, birth rituals, rituals to ancestors and wedding rituals' (Lemoine, 2012: 17; see also Lee and Tapp, 2010; Duffy et al., 2004; Khang, 2010; Thao, 2010).

Daughters, who become members of their husbands' families both physically and spiritually, are thus seen as 'other people's women' from the moment of their birth and are disadvantaged in a number of key ways (Lee and Tapp, 2010: 153; see also Lemoine, 2012; Duffy et al., 2004; Khang, 2010; Thao, 2010). For example, because son preference is an important driver of high fertility, girls are more likely than boys to have many siblings and to be poor (Chaudhuri, 2012; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007). In addition, from early childhood they are given the lion's share of household chores, with girls tending to 'work twice the amount of boys: caring for siblings, doing household chores, collecting wood and water, and caring for

> The Hmong culture is highly patriarchal, with men and women having defined roles and responsibilities. Hmong parents impose stricter rules and expectations on daughters than sons, to protect the reputation and chastity of their daughters before. Cultural expectations of being "*ib tug ntxhais txim txiaj*" or "a good/obedient Hmong daughter" include knowing how to speak Hmong; respecting her elders; staying home to cook, clean and care for siblings; being academically successful; and abstaining from socializing with or dating boys (Thao, 2010: 2).

buffalo' (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009: 167; see also Khang, 2010 and Duffy et al., 2004). This workload restricts their mobility, precludes time for rest, relaxation and socialisation and has significant impacts on their education. Our year-one girls, observing that the lives of girls and boys are '*just different*', did not mind that their brothers were allowed time off to play. Indeed, they often noted that their *older* brothers were '*just young*' and needed that time off. They were, however, quite wistful about their brothers' uninterrupted

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12 This framework draws on Boudet et al. (2012), who found that conceptions of what makes a good wife, husband, daughter or son were 'very consistent across countries and communities' (p.36).
13 Since 2000 – and particularly since 2004 – there has been a growing imbalance in Viet Nam's sex ratio, with 110.6 boys now born for every 100 girls (biological equilibrium is about 105/100) (GSO, 2011). While this gender gap is moderate for Asia, particularly compared with China, it is alarming given that it took only about five years to reach an imbalance that took India two decades to achieve (GSO, 2011; UNFPA, 2011b).

homework time. Despite that wistfulness, son preference remains prevalent even among Hmong adolescent girls. Many told us that while they would allow their future sons to complete 12th grade, their future daughters would have to leave school after 9th grade to come home and work in preparation for marriage.

3.5.2 Poverty: limited resources reinforce tradition

While '(e)conomic growth achievements in Vietnam stand as a spectacular success story' (UCW, 2009: 3), with GDP growth over 5% annually since 2000 and the poverty rate dropping from nearly 50% in 1998 to less than 17% in 2008[14] (World Bank, 2012a), minorities in general and the Hmong in particular have been left behind, with devastating consequences for Hmong girls given their unequal access to resources. Minorities account for almost half of Vietnam's poor and almost three-fifths of its food-insecure – but only an eighth of its population (Baulch et al., 2012; Chi, 2011). Moreover, as was mentioned above, the poverty gap between minority groups and the Kinh majority, like the educational gap, is steadily growing larger (Baulch and Dat, 2012; Dang, 2010). From 1998 to 2008, the poverty headcount for Kinh households fell more than threefold, from 38.8% to 11.7%, while the gains for minority groups over the same period were more modest, with poverty rates dropping by less than one-third, from 75% to 52.5%.

Box 4: Economic options for Hmong girls and women

Minority women, who face double discrimination on account of their gender and ethnicity, have particularly few economic options (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Rockefeller Foundation, 2008). As McDougall (2011) notes, '[m]inority social customs commonly dictate that males control financial assets, livestock and land-use rights certificates, potentially creating difficulties for realizing the property and land rights of minority women' (p.9). Indeed, amongst our year one Hmong respondents, the concept of women's property rights was non-existent, as all land was divided between sons under the assumption that daughters would ultimately have access to land through their husbands. In addition, girls and women noted that while wage labour was occasionally available for men, their options for work outside the home were vanishingly slim – in part because there were no jobs open to women and in part because of time-poverty which precluded the mere notion.

A lack of economic options does not imply that minority women are not working, indeed, 'the worst label that a Hmong girl can get is that she is "lazy"' (Long, 2008:25). Responsible for both the "indoor" domestic tasks – as well as an extraordinary amount of the hardest "outdoor" work – Hmong women never stop working, but their labours are unremunerated.

There is a great deal of heterogeneity in Viet Nam's ethnic minorities. The Hmong, with a poverty rate of over 80%, are amongst the most disadvantaged (Baulch and Dat, 2012). For example, they have the highest poverty rate, and the lowest educational achievements' (Luong and Nieke, 2013: 3) and 'the lowest population using clean water sources (13%) and hygienic toilets (3%)' (UNFPA, 2011c: 3). Given their geographic and cultural isolation, which in more remote areas remains nearly complete despite State efforts to relocate entire villages closer to the schools, health centres and roads of commune centres, they – and particularly their women (see Box 4) – do not typically undertake non-agricultural work. Indeed, less than a quarter of the income of 'other Northern upland minorities', of whom the Hmong are among the most numerous, is derived from non-farm sources, compared with over 70% of that of the rural Kinh (Baulch and Dat, 2012).

There are, notes Friederichsen (2012), a variety of reasons for this. First, when Kinh households were resettled to the mountains they were often given land along main roads, which made market access substantially easier. Second, Kinh families came into the mountain with strong ties to their natal communities – which again improved market access. Furthermore, because newly settled Kinh families were often given very small plots of land, they were forced 'into producing higher-value crops early on, which enabled them to accumulate sufficient capital to engage in off-farm activities such as processing, trade, and services' (p.42). Finally, as a variety of authors note, many Hmong are fundamentally not interested in pursuing other more lucrative livelihoods (Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009).

In 2012, 11.1% of the population was below the official government poverty line (GSO, 2012). Due to differences in calculation, however, figures are not directly comparable.

While some do grow cardamom, deal with tourists and produce textiles, these activities are seen as supplementary and the core of Hmong identity remains rooted in subsistence farming (ibid.). The Hmong also rarely migrate (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Michaud, 2008; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009). While approximately one-third of Vietnam's Kinh population now lives in urban areas, less than 3% of the Hmong live in cities (GSO, 2010b). Indeed, key informants from the year one research indicated that migration rates have actually dropped in recent years, due to the mitigating influence of anti-poverty programming.

Despite their agricultural lifestyles, many Hmong remain vulnerable to food insecurity. In Ha Giang, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2004) notes that many ethnic families experience an extended hunger gap, with the Government of Viet Nam (2001) adding that food insecurity is a particular problem in Meo Vac due to its scarcity of agricultural land and climate. In nearby Lao Cai province, recent rates of food insecurity are estimated to be as high as 50% (Bonnin and Turner, 2012; see also FAO, 2004; Pandey et al., 2006). Indeed, in its Ban Lien commune Oxfam and ActionAid (2011) found that 71% of study participants reported 'often' experiencing food shortages.

There is reason to suspect that food insecurity may worsen over time, as the area's mountainous geography and severe shortage of water – combined with 'factors such as population growth, state-sponsored sedentarisation, land allocation and resettlement schemes' – has led to 'intense pressure on available arable land' (World Bank, 2009, in Bonnin and Turner, 2012: 98). Complicating food production issues further is the fact that most families in Meo Vac grow corn rather than rice, due to the difficulty of farming rice on steep slopes. While that has done much to mitigate immediate hunger, corn is notorious for its negative impacts on soil fertility when grown annually over years and decades (World Issues: 360, 2010).

Study participants in our year one research concurred with these findings and observations, but also noted the overwhelming difference that anti-poverty programming has made to the commune. Most families continue to live in simple one room dwellings that are inadequate to fend off the bitter cold of winter and rely on the constant labour of all adults and girl children in order to make ends meet. Furthermore, most girls know that upper secondary school is out of reach because their parents are poor. That said, adult study participants in our year-one research noted that hunger in their villages is largely a thing of the past and that along with roads and electricity have come modern conveniences such as corn grinders and motorbikes, which are both reducing workloads and improving productivity.

3.5.3 Education: tremendous progress, but still unequal
A strong preference for sons and limited resources combine to reduce Hmong girls' options for schooling in ways that are markedly different from their non-Hmong peers. On a national level, Viet Nam's progress towards educating its children has been as spectacular as its economic success. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2012) note that '[b]etween 1992 and 2008, primary level completion rates rose from 45.0 per cent to 89.8 per cent' (p.1). Furthermore, Viet Nam 'has closed and even reversed gender gaps in primary, secondary and tertiary schooling' (World Bank, 2011: 27). Despite this laudable progress, however, 'disparities still remain and education attainment is much lower among several groups, particularly among ethnic minority groups' (MoET and UNICEF, 2012: 1). While some ethnic groups have enrolment rates approaching those of the Kinh, overall the enrolment gap at upper-secondary level has grown over the past decade, as Kinh students have made larger gains than minority children (Baulch and Dat, 2012). Addressing this gap is vital, given that Wells-Dang (2012) found that 'improved education levels' are an important factor (along with 'improved market access') in explaining why some ethnic communities are beginning to close the gap between themselves and the Kinh (p.37).

Hmong children are particularly disadvantaged educationally; as can be seen in Figure 2 below, only a tiny percentage complete secondary school. There are two stories in these numbers. First, reflecting the reality that this is the first generation of Hmong children to have the option of formal education, enrolment rates are low for all children – regardless of gender. Second, Hmong girls are significantly less likely to attend school, particularly high school, than their brothers. While even at the primary level boys' enrolment (78%) is higher than girls' (67%), by upper-secondary school Hmong boys are nearly three times more likely to be enrolled (9.7% versus 3.4%) (UNFPA, 2011a).

Figure 2: **Hmong net enrolment rates by age and gender**
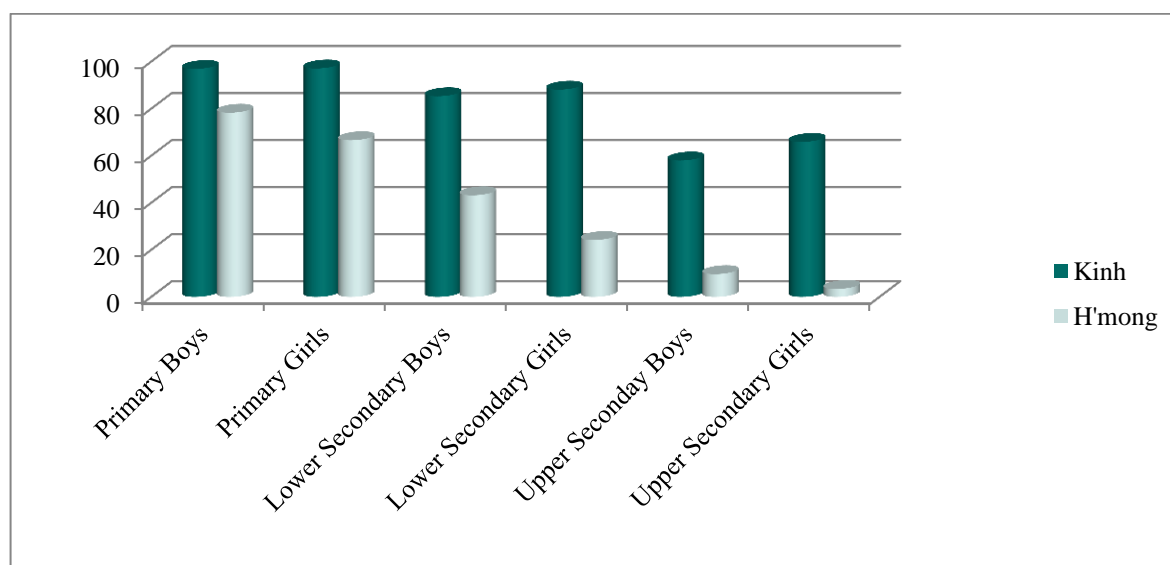
Source: UNFPA (2011a)

A variety of barriers make it difficult for Hmong girls to access education. For example, while few children, boys or girls, begin school able to speak Vietnamese, girls' progress on this front tends to be slower (2012; UNICEF et al., 2008; World Bank, 2009; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007). Not only do they tend to be very shy, but they are kept so busy in unpaid household chores that they have fewer non-Hmong social outlets in which to practice their language skills. While the Government has attempted to remediate language barriers by ensuring that all villages have kindergartens, so that exposure to Vietnamese comes earlier, there are only a handful of mother-tongue primary classrooms in the country. Given that many of the younger adolescents with whom we spoke were not yet fluent in the Kinh language, there are concerns that this monolingual curriculum is broadly hindering learning.

This language barrier is compounded by the fact that girls are already, as was mentioned above, seen as 'poor investments', because they will leave their natal families on marriage (Liu, 2004; see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Lee and Tapp, 2010; UNICEF et al., 2008). Evidence of continued son preference in regard to education was clear in our year one research. In addition to the attitudes expressed by adolescents, it was notable that even in families that clearly valued education – and had sent one or more children, even a girl – on to upper secondary school or university, it was often the case that one of the family's daughters was never sent to school at all, as her labour was needed at home. This was despite the fact that teachers widely recognised that girls are better students than boys, as they are generally more focussed and less playful (in large part due to familial expectations and domestic work pressures).

Commune-specific truancy fines and heavy messaging about the importance of education to both poverty alleviation and more successful motherhood, are, according to our year one study participants, now keeping the vast majority of Ta Lung's Hmong girls in school until they complete lower secondary school (9th grade). Very few, however, are allowed by their parents to make the transition to upper secondary school, which most often entails boarding—and is therefore troublesome. In part, parents are concerned for their daughters' physical safety. Many communes are located in treacherous terrain, making even one trip per week a dangerous proposition (UNICEF et al., 2008: 21; see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007). Girls' social safety is also worrisome to parents—who are concerned about girls and boys living with one another with inadequate supervision (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; UNICEF et al., 2008). In large part, however, upper secondary school is simply seen as not worth the expense – particularly for girls, who are unlikely, due to cultural constraints, to engage in wage employment (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009) and whose income would regardless accrue to their marital, rather than natal, families. While upper secondary school is rarely judged worthwhile even for boys,

given the dearth of non-agricultural employment options in the highlands, year one families were overwhelmingly likely to admit that *if* a child were to be sent to school, it would be a boy.

3.5.4 Silence and isolation: limiting agency, perpetuating the past

Constrained by both youth and gender, adolescent girls across Viet Nam have limited voice not only in their families, but also over their own lives. Lewis (2005) notes that filial piety, which mandates respect and obedience towards one's elders—as well as care for them in their old age—permeates Vietnamese culture, leading to a 'near-constant sense of awareness of the debt one owes' (p. 12). Ultimately this piety drives many of the "decisions" that adolescents make about their own futures, as they faithfully accept their parents' choices even when they know them to be, in the longer-run, disadvantageous. Gender adds another layer to girls' lack of voice, as by tradition they are bound by three rules: before marriage, they must obey their fathers, during marriage, they must follow their husbands, and after widowhood, they must listen to their sons (Nguyen, 1995, in Volkmann, 2005; see also ISDS, 2010; UNICEF, 2010).

Embedded in a culture that 'generally place(s) the interest of the group – whether it is the family, the clan, or the community – before the interests of the individual', and 'traditionally view(s) social roles, in terms of family, age and gender, as fixed', Hmong girls, particularly those from most isolated communes, have little space to exercise their agency and imagine new futures (Duffy et al., 2004: 38). Indeed, among the families in our year one research, most girls could not imagine expressing their own opinions. While they actively participated in classroom academics, and even took on assigned leadership roles, they were almost shocked when asked if they felt they could speak to their teachers about non-academic topics. Most critically, while the majority felt they could tell their parents if they wanted a particular shirt at the market, none were able to change their parents' minds about school-leaving. Few even tried. While it should be noted that age also plays a role in this limited agency – as the obligations of filial piety weigh on boys as well as girls – among our study participants, boys are given substantially more freedom, both in terms of mobility and decision-making, than girls. As one noted, '*My brothers have more freedom*'.

In our year-one research, the strongest theme to emerge regarding girls' voice was not, however, in regard to decision-making, which they considered a largely foreign concept that had little place in their lives, but was rather in regard to their social isolation. Driven by cultural norms, time poverty, physical isolation after they leave school, and an intense need not to burden their already over-burdened mothers, most girls we interviewed were very lonely. They did not feel that they could speak to their teachers about non-academic subjects, they did not feel they could speak to their friends, even when they had time to see them, about anything that might touch family honour, like their experiences with gender-based violence, and they recognised that their mothers were even more overworked and socially isolated than they were. While girls enjoyed gathering wood and grass together in the afternoon, few were able to identify a single person in their lives to whom they could turn with a problem or with whom they could explore a dream.

Box5: Hmong girls' social isolation

We don't share when we feel sad or angry or disappointed [...] I just keep things in my heart.

I can't talk to anyone – not to friends, not my sister, not my father – because I don't want to make them sad.

I don't share these types of feelings with my friends. With girlfriends we only talk about small things – about study and what we don't understand with homework. I wouldn't want to share about my family quarrelling or my parents not giving me permission to hang out with friends – we don't like to share about family problems.

3.5.5 Marriage practices: restricting girls' roles but showing signs of change

Hmong marriage practices have shifted considerably over recent decades due to both encroaching modernisation and the enforcement of Vietnamese law (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007). However, despite the fact that arranged marriages and forcible bride kidnappings have been increasingly supplanted by boy-initiated love matches--and the statistical reality that the age of first marriage appears to be steadily climbing--marriage still works in a variety of ways to limit Hmong girls' options.

Lemoine (2012) reports, and our year-one grandparents confirmed, that as recently as two generations ago most Hmong girls were typically married even before puberty, often to cousins, to meet family needs. Others were the victims of forcible bride kidnapping. In both cases, girls' wishes were completely ignored, as marriage decisions took 'no account of the girl's feelings if she does not want to marry or does not want this particular husband' (Lemoine, 2012: 5).

Indeed, while it has been suggested that early marriage amongst the Hmong is in large part cultural preference (Amin and Teerawichitchainan, 2009), one that continues to be quite common even among second- and third-generation diasporic Hmong communities (Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011; Lemoine, 2012; Khang, 2010; Duffy et al., 2004), DeJaeghere and Miske (2009) report that it is not, by and large, *girls*' preference. 'Most girls,' they note, 'did not want to marry early', even though they recognised that their family was poor and that their husband's family needed 'to have more labour' (pp.168-169). This is hardly surprising, given the constant negotiation required for young Hmong wives, who must juggle not only the demands of marriage and motherhood, but also those of in-laws (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011; Khang, 2010; Duffy et al., 2004). This latter role, seen as ancillary in the West, is so central that Long (2008) reports that according to Hmong custom, marriage is seen as 'becoming a daughter-in-law'.

Box 6: Hmong childhood and adolescence

Traditionally, as the 'Hmong believe that a person should be industrious, contribute to the family in the form of labour, and fulfil their role in society as soon as they are able', the community has no concept of adolescence (Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011: 146). Indeed, Lemoine (2012a) reports that historically they have had no concept of even childhood. While relations are governed by strict hierarchies of age, a child's world is not seen as fundamentally different from an adult's and children are treated 'with the same respect given a living adult individual', in part because of beliefs that 'he is but the reincarnation of a passed away adult' (p.8).

That said, increased opportunities for schooling have quickly brought the concept of childhood into sharp relief in Hmong communities, as children now have their own spaces in which they spend hours each day involved in academic pursuits that fundamentally separate their world from that of adults, as the material they study at school has little to do with the reality of their home lives.

Adolescence, on the other hand, remains a tenuous concept, even for adolescents. While it might be argued that the space between school-leaving and marriage is serving as a functional adolescence, as children are still seen as children, this period in many ways is more infantilising than maturing. Adolescents, and particularly girls, are expected to shoulder an adult workload, but have no voice in family decision-making and are almost completely prevented from investing in their own individual futures.

The Vietnamese Marriage and Family Law of 2000 prohibits the marriage of girls under the age of 18 and boys under the age of 20. Anecdotally at least[15,16], this has significantly reduced early marriage, but the Hmong still have the lowest average age of first marriage for women in Viet Nam – 18.8 years, compared to 23.1 years for Kinh women (UNFPA, 2011a). Top-down messaging regarding under-age marriage is working

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15 Statistical evidence is both rare and likely inaccurate. Not only are the Hmong often grouped with "other Northern upland minorities" in national statistics—but because 'the traditional Hmong conceptualization of marriage does not include notions of legal sanction by a court of law'—the age at which marriage takes place is unlikely to enter the public record (Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011: 147), particularly, as will be discussed below, when that marriage is illegal.

16 The Government of Viet Nam does collect data about the singulate mean age of first marriage, by ethnicity, but that data does not appear to be in the public domain. Census tables publicly available break data by province, but not ethnicity. Thus, while UNFPA reports 2009 data, we are not able to directly compare it to 1999 data as we are unable to access those figures.

to change not just practices, but attitudes. In our year-one research, none of the mothers and daughters we interviewed saw early marriage as desirable in part because they, like the girls in T.H. Nguyen et al.'s (2011) research, wished to have more time before they were forced by custom to don the burdensome mantle of daughter-in-law. While they were able to tell stories about cousins and acquaintances in other villages who had married as early as 13, they reported that due to heavy fines in their own village, there had been no early marriages in several years.

Our year-one study participants also reported that arranged marriages are now rare, echoing the 8% rate reported for women under-30 in another study, and that bride-kidnapping is much reduced (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007).

3.5.6 Fertility: limited information, limited options

Academic reports of traditional sexual freedom notwithstanding (see Lemoine, 2012), our year-one study participants were clear that sexual contact before marriage is deeply taboo within their Hmong community – with both information and contraception accordingly limited (see also Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007; Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011). To a large extent these attitudes align closely with those found in the broader Vietnamese culture, where, while 'data indicate that premarital sexual relationships have increased in Vietnam over the past decade' (Kaljee et al., 2011: 269; see also Hong et al., 2009; Pham et al., 2012), adults remain concerned about offering sexuality-related education because they believe they should not 'show the ways for the deer to run' (Hong et al., 2009). Accordingly, most sex-related parent–child communication in Viet Nam is limited to simple messages such as 'no sex' and 'no boy/girlfriends until schooling is complete' (Hong et al., 2009; Pham et al., 2012). Similarly, classes at school are 'traditional with imposing messages', which make 'young people feel embarrassed' and tend to bury sexuality itself under other content, such as biology or population (WGNRR, 2012; see also Hong et al., 2009).

Amongst our year-one study participants, even these messages were largely absent. Girls were rarely even told by their mothers to expect their periods, let alone about reproduction. Few girls reported any sexuality-related education at school and most, when they could bring themselves to discuss it all, said their information came from their peers. All of our study participants, adults and adolescents, girls and boys, noted that an out-of-wedlock pregnancy would be deeply shameful, though a key informant noted that it would also be easily addressed by following Hmong custom and allowing the errant children to marry. This fits with the observations of both Lemoine (2012) and T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011), who reported that giving birth before marriage is considered a cultural anathema because it would necessarily take place in a girl's natal household, angering the spirits of her ancestors.

While T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) report that Hmong girls near Meo Vac town 'had quite a good understanding about condoms, pills, the intra-uterine device (coil), calculating their menstrual cycle and even vasectomies' because they were able to obtain information 'from the Internet, television, newspapers, books and friends' (p. 209), we found, amongst our year-one study participants, that unmarried adolescents had essentially no knowledge about the practicalities of contraception. That said, their mothers, safely married and thus "allowed" to know these things, reported good uptake of family planning, with most having only 2-4 children, which is low given that the Hmong fertility rate is 4.96 (compared to a national average of 2.03)(UNFPA, 2011a). In addition to government messaging that the ideal family has only two children, and the provision of free contraception to all married couples, many of the year one mothers noted that their own mothers and older sisters, who had often raised 7 to 10 children in desperate poverty, had encouraged them to have smaller families.

On a national level, married adolescents, while fully informed about contraceptive options, rarely use them. Indeed, because the typical pattern is for Vietnamese couples to begin childbearing soon after marriage, with girls 'expected to get pregnant not more than 1 or at the most 2 years after marriage', adolescent marriage is typically closely followed by adolescent motherhood (Klingberg-Allvin et al., 2008: 340). Indeed, Lemoine (2012) notes that Hmong wives are suspected of sterility if they do not quickly deliver a child.

Only 15% of young wives between the ages of 15 and 19 report using any modern method of contraception – significantly less than the 44% of women aged 20-24 and the 60% of women aged 25-29 (GSO et al., 2011). As they are likely to marry as adolescents, Hmong girls are also typically young mothers. While figures are

not disaggregated, trends are clear from Figure 3, which shows that adolescent fertility rates for minority girls (99/1,000) are nearly three times those of Kinh (ethnic majority) girls (37/1,000) – and the rates of the least educated (171/1,000) are more than eight times those of the most educated (19/1,000) (GSO et al., 2011).

Figure 3: **Birth rate per thousand, girls age 15-19, 2011**
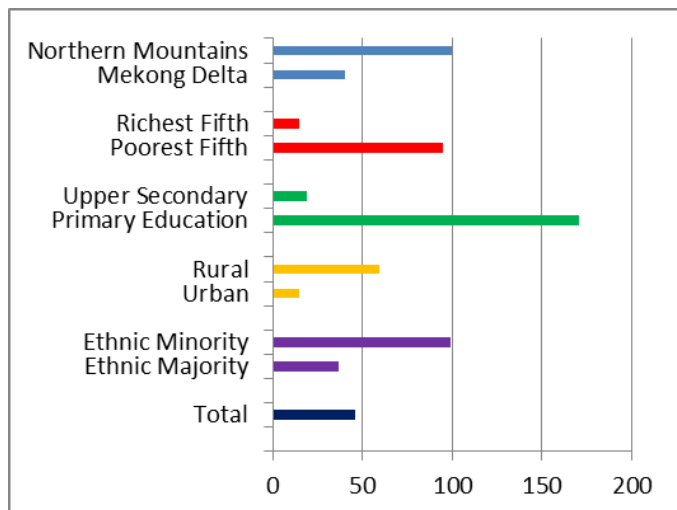
Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, (GSO et al.,2011)

Furthermore, while Viet Nam has met goals regarding prenatal care and maternal mortality at a national level, 'the maternal mortality rate in … the northern mountainous regions is four to eight times higher than that in the lowland plains' (McDougall, 2011: 11). Nearly all Kinh women receive at least one antenatal check-up, compared with only 73% of minority women (GSO et al., 2011). Additionally, while nearly 95% of adult women receive care, less than 88% of girls under the age of 20 are seen at least once (ibid.). Poverty and its associated disadvantages seem to be significant barriers to antenatal care; women from the lowest wealth quintile are far less likely than other women to receive care (78% versus over 95% for all other quintiles) (ibid.). As early marriage – and adolescent pregnancy – is associated with poverty, this leaves the poorest, youngest women at the highest risk. They are also the least likely to have a skilled attendant at birth. SAVY II found that 'less than half the young women from ethnic minority areas (47.4%) reported having a health professional in attendance' (GSO et al., 2010c: 48).

Box 7: Hmong birth rituals

Hmong birth rituals are intimately linked to Hmong spiritual beliefs. Babies are usually delivered at home by their paternal grandmothers and their fathers and, because the placenta is seen as the 'soul's shirt', and must be collected by the soul at the end of life, it is buried in particular locations. Boys' placentas are traditionally buried under the main post of the house, reflecting their centrality in family life. Girls' placentas, on the other hand, are most often buried under their parents' bed, signifying their relationship with fertility. Women's diets are tightly controlled for the post-partum phase, which lasts one month, and revolve around warmth at all costs. Babies have 'soul-calling ceremonies' when they are three days old and are not seen as actual people until that point.

The importance of these birthing rituals has been identified as a key reason that Hmong women prefer to give birth at home. Oosterhoff et al. (2011) note that 'birthing at state health facilities is a highly medicalised procedure in which women deliver lying on their back attended by medical staff while family members wait outside' (p. S227). Coupled with the fact that Hmong-speaking providers are relatively rare, most Hmong women prefer to deliver at home—where they can squat or sit and have men by their sides to cut the cord and appropriately deal with the placenta.

Source: White et al. (2012); Oosterhoff et al (2011); Lee and Pfeifer (2006); Lee and Tapp (2010); Liamputtong (2007); Duffy et al. (2004).

T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011), White et al. (2012) and Turner (2012a) observe that Hmong women, due to rugged geography, custom[17] (see Box 7) and language barriers, are particularly unlikely to obtain any sort of maternity care. Indeed, none of the births reported in our year \-one research were attended by skilled attendants.

3.5.7 Gender-based violence: endemic, even when not reported

Gender-based violence is very common in Viet Nam. A recent government survey on domestic violence found that nearly 60% of ever-married Vietnamese women had experienced at least one form of domestic violence: one-half reported emotional violence, one-third reported physical violence and one-tenth reported sexual violence (GSO, 2010a). These numbers match those of Nanda et al. (2012), who found that 60% of Vietnamese men admitted using some form of violence against their intimate partner – and that 'in Vietnam 90 percent men agreed that to be a man you need to be tough' (p.2). Interestingly, in large scale national surveys minority women were less likely than majority women to report domestic abuse – although this may of course reflect cultural sensibilities more than violence rates *per se* (Rasanathan and Bhushan, 2011).

Our year one study participants suggest the accuracy of this assumption[18]. While many mothers were loath to discuss the specifics of their own situations, girls and key informants reported endemic, alcohol-fuelled gender-based violence directed at wives. With extremely limited official intervention – aimed at either prevention or remediation – the girls we interviewed were desperate for help. Indeed, when asked what programmes or information they wanted, most listed helping their mothers *'avoid scolding'* as one of their top wishes.

Divorce is not traditionally an option for Hmong women. In part this is due to economic reality, as women's natal families often lack sufficient food to feed another mouth. In large part, however, it is the result of culture, as women become so thoroughly a part of their husband's clan upon marriage that they are told 'your mother's womb is what you borrowed' (Lemoine, 2012: 16; see also Moua, 2003). Indeed, because the institution of marriage has been seen historically as crucial to maintaining clan ties and is 'valued as more important than physical and emotional safety in an abusive relationships', even women genuinely at risk have no recourse (Lee and Tapp, 2010: 159).

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17 There is a vast literature on Hmong uptake of "modern" medicine. See, as a starting point, http://libguides.csuchico.edu/hmongvamericanculture-medicine

18 Diasporic Hmong women's voices have also been critical to understanding the prevalence and severity of GBV in the Hmong community. Indeed, Lemoine (2012a) observes that the "outspoken women of the second and third generation of refugees" have only recently cracked the silence that surrounded the issue even throughout decades of close ethnographic research (2). See, for example: Rhodes (2008) and the many excerpts of poetry and narrative reprinted in Long (2008).

4 Primary research overview: Ha Giang, Meo Vac and Ta Lung

4.1 Situating our research

Our year-two research, like our year-one research, was conducted in Ha Giang province, which is in the Northern Mountains of Viet Nam bordering China (see Figure 4). Ha Giang is rocky, dry and sparsely populated. It is also nearly one-third Hmong and among the most deprived regions in Viet Nam. As Table 3 shows, its Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is .33, ranking it 61 out of 63 provinces, and 38.5% of its inhabitants are below the extremely low national poverty line.

Figure 4: **Map of Ha Giang**   **Figure 5: Meo Vac district in Ha Giang province**

Table 3: Poverty characteristics in Ha Giang

MPI	MPI rank (out of 63 provinces)	Percent below national poverty line	Poverty rate rank (out of 63)
0.3325 *	61*	38.5+	61+

Source: *Viet Nam HDR 2011, based on Viet Nam Living Standards Survey (VLSS) 2008; + VHLSS 2012

Within Ha Giang, we again chose Ta Lung commune in Meo Vac district to conduct our research. Meo Vac is regarded as the homeland of Viet Nam's Hmong population, and Ta Lung commune, which is home to approximately 2,600 people living in 400 households in 8 villages, some more central and some quite remote, is 98% Hmong. The commune's poverty rate[19], which is verified annually, is 58%, making it one of the six poorest communes in Meo Vac. Though this figure represents progress from last year, when the poverty rate was 65%, it should be noted that poverty rates are often determined by political targets, rather than economic reality.

While a handful of study participants are officials of some sort, working for the health clinic or the Women's Union for monthly wages, most families in Ta Lung are subsistence farmers. They primarily grow corn, their main foodstuff, and raise livestock, including cows and pigs.

Picture 3: Meo Vac at sunset

Ta Lung's villages are quite disparate. Those near the commune centre have had, for example, better and longer access to schools and health clinics and longer access to electricity. Served by roads that are accessible by car, they are not only better linked to the larger economy and culture, but are also better served by NGOs. The more remote villages, in which we worked this year, only received electrical and mobile phone services in 2010. Furthermore, while most now have their own kindergartens to encourage earlier exposure to the Vietnamese language, these "satellite" schools go only until 4th grade, meaning children as young as nine are expected to walk down steep rocky footpaths to the main school in the commune centre, up to an hour and half each way, every day.

Ta Lung has its own lower secondary school, which goes through 9th grade and has a mix of boarders and day students, although it should be noted that children consider themselves boarders if they stay for lunch. The upper secondary school is in Meo Vac town, an hour past the commune centre, and is more properly a boarding school, as children not only eat, but sleep, at school, returning home only on weekends. Meo Vac also hosts the Continuing Education Centre, which allows adult learners to complete through 12th grade, and a Vocational Education Centre, which opened only last year.

Because of its high minority population, Ta Lung is targeted for a variety of government support, including the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Programme (Programme 30a) and Programme 135, both of which are focused on infrastructure and capacity development, as well as targeted programmes directed at vocational training and water and sanitation. Until last year, all students in the commune also received educational fee waivers. These have now been phased out in favour of targeting based on poverty rather than geography or ethnicity. The Meo Vac district is also a current focus of Plan International's Because I Am a Girl programme, which targets child marriage and girls' education. One commune official, however, noting the history of a completed World Bank programme, commented, *'[The] problem is projects come and go – they are like the wind.'*

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19 Poverty rates are calculated in divergent ways – with the Government's official poverty line recognized as particularly low by international standards (World Bank, 2012b). Key is that Hmong are amongst the poorest of Viet Nam's minorities.

4.2 Policy context in Ha Giang province in relation to adolescent girls

Outside of education, where there is clear evidence of well-focused attention, adolescent girls are largely invisible to community leaders and policymakers. Provincial officials in Ha Giang report that parents are responsible for making decisions about their girls' lives and that the government and traditional leadership exists largely to give advice. For example, while child marriage is illegal and some villages have been able, using fines and returning girls to their natal homes, to stamp out the practice in only a few years, KIs in more remote villages note that their job is only to tell parents what they *ought* to do—not make them do it. As one said, '*We wouldn't be able to prevent it, because we don't know when they get married*.' Similarly, while KIs reported that gender-based violence is declining due to messaging and community involvement, it is clear from other study participants that programming of any sort enjoys only limited implementation.

In part this lack of follow-through is due to local officials feeling overwhelmed. As Hmong who have grown up in Meo Vac, they understand day-to-day cultural realities. As officials who have regular contact not only with the Kinh, but also with other ethnic groups, they see how far 'behind' the Hmong are. Local KIs understand that child marriage and bride kidnapping, while much reduced over recent years, is not uncommon. Similarly, they understand that upper secondary education remains all too rare. From where they stand, national-level edicts, which do not take into account Hmong realities, feel very difficult to implement and matching national averages—be they educational or fertility-related-- seems all but impossible.

Lack of coordination among departments at the provincial level makes implementation even more challenging. For example, when asked about the specific challenges facing adolescent girls in the province, one year-one KI noted that the Department of Gender Equality was only established in Ha Giang in 2009 and another indicated that the concept of gender remained new, unfamiliar and not integrated into programming-- except that put together by the Women's Union. Moreover, when questioned about the issues facing minority families, KIs indicated that only the Cultural Department would have answers – and likely only at the district level. When pressed to identify how they might tackle a crosscutting issue like early marriage, which would potentially touch the mandates of multiple departments, DoLISA KIs referred to a lack of data and dismissed the issue as one outside their mandate. Instead, they considered it the purview of the Department of Legal Affairs.

Picture 4: One of Ta Lung's villages

Data – and guidance on how to use it – is also clearly an issue. Provincial-level KIs indicated that they received little guidance from the central government in terms of policy implementation. They were also almost entirely unaware of statistical evidence collected by the national government and donors of relevance to adolescents and gender relations. For example, KIs knew nothing of SAVY (Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth), the Study on Domestic Violence in Viet Nam or even MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey). As one KI noted, *'In western countries you have research, we don't […] we just deal with issues at a very small scale.'* Given that Viet Nam actually collects very good and broad data on poverty reduction and human development, this is evidence of a lack of both communication and political will.

Moreover, Hmong representation at the provincial level is quite rare, which means that there is often little attempt to adapt national-level policy prescriptions and bureaucratic procedures to local realities.

In sum, the policy environment—from the central to the commune levels—for addressing the specific vulnerabilities of adolescent Hmong girls is generally unfavourable. While officials are not actively opposed to engaging with this age cohort, they are poorly informed and resourced, have very weak institutional incentives to take a proactive approach, and lack the institutionalised space in which developing a holistic and inter-agency approach to tackling multidimensional vulnerabilities might be possible.

5 The impact of Hmong marriage practices on adolescent girls and women

Hmong marriage practices, which include marriages arranged by parents, marriage by abduction and love matches, mark 'the greatest change in the life of a woman' and continue to place a disproportionate burden on girls, in terms of both getting married and being married (Duffy et al., 2004: 38). Under the strictly patriarchal, patrilocal clan system, Hmong girls have less choice over marriage partners than do boys and are expected to bear the brunt of household labour – as well as to have as many children as necessary in order to give their husbands' family a son. Many, if not most, experience gender-based violence and none have the option of divorce. Our study participants agreed that while some practices are shifting rapidly, most are more entrenched.

Picture 5: A young Hmong couple with their first baby

5.1 Getting married

'I hadn't finished my schooling. I didn't want to get married; I wanted to finish my studies, but my husband dragged me away.' (Adolescent girl, 17)

'We liked each other; we talked to each other, and then got married.' (Adolescent girl, 18)

5.1.1 When do girls get married

Our study participants were unable to come to any agreement about the average age at which girls in Ta Lung marry – other than parroting back the national law, which prohibits the marriage of girls under the age of 18 and boys under the age of 20. Most felt that girls today are marrying later than they did in the past, primarily because traditional arranged consanguineous child marriages have now died out. Others, however, felt that girls are marrying earlier, largely because they have more contact with boys now that they are in school and are not confined so strictly to the home (see Box F). Triangulating the beliefs of our study participants with the actual ages of the married partners in the families of our study participants, it seems that while most girls marry at 18 or 19, like those in T.H. Nguyen et al.'s (2011) research, a very significant proportion marry at 17 - and a handful continue to marry against their will as early as 14.

5.2 Contested timing

Box 8: Perceptions about generational shifts in age of marriage

Now marriage is sooner -16 or 17 usually. (Mother)

In the past when a child was 8 or 9 years old, parents began looking for a wife or husband, such thing doesn't happen now. (Mother)

In the past, we got married later; now the youth gets married earlier. We didn't get married until age 22, 23 or 24. (Mother)

In the past, the marriage age was around 14-15; now it's 16; that's to my personal judgment. (Teacher)

A small purposively selected sample is not conducive to numerical analysis. That said, there appear to be two trends related to marriage age worth future exploration. First, given changes to the national law, it seems notable that our sample included a number of girls who married at 16, despite the fact that their mothers married at 19 or 21. While it is clear that the average age of marriage has increased considerably compared to grandparents' generation, several of our young adult study participants noted that just in the last few years girls have begun to marry at younger ages. This needs close attention if the gains made by mothers in regard to child marriage are to be consolidated in their daughters. A second, and more encouraging trend, is the number of girls who are not married by the age of 20. While even in the last generation there were women who married this 'late', this appears to be a more common occurrence today, even in the more remote villages where child marriage remains more prevalent.

5.2.1 Who choses?

Our study participants uniformly agreed that arranged marriage is a thing of the past. While grandparents told us that they had largely been married to partners chosen by their parents, often cousins, arranged marriages were already becoming rare in the parents' generation. While Hmong adolescent girls accept without question the decisions that their parents make about their lives in all other regards, partner selection was a choice about which they felt fierce. For example, a 19-year-old hotly stated, '*Children choose (partners) themselves. If I didn't like him, I would just go away. My parents couldn't force me.*' Parents are all too aware of how strongly girls feel. One noted that girls sometimes run away to China if their parents try to force them to marry someone they do not love and another commented, '*in Cán Chu Phì commune, (a girl) killed herself because her parents forced her to get married*' (adult in FGD).

It should be noted that suicide does not appear to be unusual in the Hmong community in which this research took place. Many study participants, both this year and last year, spoke of knowing people who '*ate heartbreak grass*'. Indeed, one OCS said that three of her siblings-in-law, as well as her father-in-law, had killed themselves in this manner in order to escape the mother-in-law, who had a violent tongue. Lemoine (2012) argues that shame – and damaged pride – are the primary reasons that Hmong people kill themselves.

While one mother in a FGD exhibited a remarkable level of sangfroid, commenting, *'Let her choose her own husband, if she is unhappy or happy, it will be her business'*, most parents tacitly agreed with girls that partner choice was a key way to reduce girls' marital risk. Another mother in a FGD explained, *'We won't force our daughter to get married; we're afraid that she may marry a husband who doesn't love her, then she will suffer her whole life.'* The intensity of mothers' support for chosen marriages is perhaps best understood through the words of *their* mothers – several of whom noted that their own arranged marriages, and thus their children's childhoods, had been fraught with domestic violence (discussed in more detail below). Interestingly, girls were concerned not only about their own well-being in an arranged marriage, but also about their parents' reputation. One explained, *'If my parents arrange my marriage, in the future the husband may not like me, he will blame my parents, saying that he doesn't want to marry me and telling me to go.'*

> *'Back then when [my son] Sung said that he would get married, I told him he was not old enough, so I wouldn't let him. Sung said if I didn't let him, he would drag (his wife) home on his own accord.'*
>
> (Mother of a 16-year-old boy who married a 14-year-old girl)

Picture 6: A Hmong girl coming home from the fields

While several boys reported that they had asked their parents' permission before they initiated marriage, and one girl even said that if she could not find a husband then she would ask her parents to find one for her, parents largely felt voiceless in their children's marital decision-making. Several commented that even if their child chose a spouse they did not like, it would be upon them, and not their child, to deal with disappointment. A mother in a marital network, for example, said, *'If my son had found a wife who I didn't like, I wouldn't have turned her down.'* Another mother, reflecting on her daughter's marriage to a man she now respects and likes, noted, *'Back then we weren't happy. That family was very poor. But they had already gotten to know each other, so there was nothing we could do.'* While these sentiments are commonplace in a Western context, in the Hmong community they represent a very significant shift over past practices.

However, while there is broad consensus that parents no longer choose their children's partners, this does not necessarily mean that the bride and groom choose each other. It remains unacceptable in the Hmong community for a girl to show any interest in a boy until he has actively pursued her for some time. Indeed, for her to do so would risk her being seen as a 'bad' girl. As one 16-year-old boy noted, *'The boys choose. They marry the girls they like. If the girl takes the first step, the boy will refuse right away.'* Another, age 17, added, *'Girls are afraid that if proposing their love first, they can be criticized by their friends.'* Girls understand that they '*shouldn't accept right away*', that they '*should refuse a little bit.'* As one young woman, now 20, summed up, *'As a girl, I don't have the right to like them first.'*

These traditions, while they relegate girls to second-fiddle and confuse the meaning of the word "no", do not leave girls without choice, at least most of the time (bride-kidnapping will be discussed below). Girls and boys reported that they most often meet one another at the Meo Vac market. and marriages are contracted particularly during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. One girl in an SGD said, '*When hanging around in the New Year, if he likes me first and I think that he is fine I will like him. If I don't like him, I won't see him again.'* Another added, '*If he likes me and I like him, I can meet him*

and like him. If he likes me, but I don't like him, I can turn to work and run away.' While some mothers and fathers told us that they had also met at the market, overall it appears that 'dating' venues are shifting, as most parents had met in the fields as they worked. Indeed, one mother reported significant concern about this change, as she feels that it has reduced girls' chances of choosing well. She said, '*In my time, we met when we were working, and when we were out cutting grass, or tending cows and goats. Today they only meet at the market, or date each other somewhere else, so they rarely see one another in the fields. They don't know if he's hard working or if he has any good virtue.*'

While Hmong families, like their Kinh counterparts, tend to be patriclocal, meaning that they live with or near the husband's family, in Meo Vac this rarely translates into any significant distance. Because most young couples meet at the Meo Vac market, most marry within the commune. This has important implications for girls' and women's well-being, as their natal families are likely to be within several hours walking distance.

5.2.2 What drives attraction?
While girls and boys have overlapping opinions about what sort of person they would like to marry, they also have their own gendered interests. Both, for the most part, are interested in a good looking spouse. One 16-year-old boy said, '*if I think that she is beautiful, I will talk with her.*' A 17-year-old girl in a GP concurred, '*I want to marry a man like any other good looking, handsome man.*'

Both, for the most part, are also keen to improve their financial status with marriage. However, while for girls that improvement largely comes through choosing boys that have a '*beautiful house and land*' and avoiding those who do not '*have much corn farm, not enough fields to make enough to eat each year*', for boys it means choosing a wife who can work. One young man noted, '*I chose her because she was pretty, skillful and able to cut a big tree.*' An adult in an FGD added that young men '*pay attention to nothing more than diligence*'. A 16-year-old boy agreed, '*To me, knowing how to work is the more important virtue. That girl needs to know how to do things such as cutting grass, collecting firewood, and at home she has to know how to cook, and take care of pigs, going to get vegetables to cook mash for the pigs. I will only like her if she's like that.*' Indeed, another, age 18, added that when he must choose his wife, '*I must choose the one who's uglier but good at farm work.*'

Girls are very aware of what makes them attractive to boys. One, an orphan, explained, '*He thought of me as an orphan, so he wanted to marry me. He knew that after marriage, I would move to his house, work at home and work on the field, and an orphan wouldn't respond to other people's call and only stay with him.*' Even so, girls are hopeful that their own marriages will be different—and that their husbands will work *with* them and love them for who they are rather than what they do. As one young woman explained, '*I also hope that the husbands will understand them more, and care for them more, not just marrying them for the purpose of taking care of their families. Because Hmong people have such a perception.*'

Indeed, in stark contrast to their mothers, who appear to have largely married in order to ward off hunger, love appears increasingly important to Hmong girls. One, in an SGD, said, '*I won't choose to marry because he is rich or poor, the only important thing is that I love him and he loves me sincerely, I will choose such man to marry*'.

Hmong boys' interest in love, however, remains more traditional – they seem primarily concerned that their future wives love their (the boys') natal families, which underscores the key relationship between wives' roles as wives and wives' roles as daughters-in-law. One, 16 years old, explained that he would only choose a girl after careful consideration: '*After sitting and talking with each other for a long time, I have to know if she loves my uncle and his wife and if she loves my younger sister, before bringing her home.*' The word choice of study participants often captured the key nature of the relationship between a girl and her future in-laws, who are almost always referred to as *her* parents, even though they are in fact *his* parents.

Girls and boys also expressed gendered differences in their preferences for temperament. Boys, as might be expected, are interested in quiet, gentle, soft-spoken girls. For example, a 16-year-old boy said, '*If you work with a girl who speaks normally, you don't feel tired, but if you work with a girl who speaks loud, you feel a bit angry.*' Girls, on the other hand, are focused on winnowing out boys that they believe might become

violent. One, married at 19, explained that she accepted her husband's proposal solely because he was not prone to drunken rages. '*My husband,*' she said, '*was a silly man, but his temper was normal, so I got married immediately.*' Another young woman added that temperament is far more important than good looks; '*It was said that handsome man was ill-natured. A normal husband doesn't beat or scold his wife.*'

Picture 7: Three generations of a Hmong family

5.2.3 Marriage by "abduction"

Bride kidnapping, a longstanding Hmong tradition on which the media has tended to focus because it emphasizes the Hmong's 'cultural distance from the Kinh' (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011), appears to be more common in remote villages than our year-one research and the more recent literature has suggested. While the practice is certainly vastly less common than it was a generation ago (see also T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007), a significant minority of girls and young women in this round of research had been forcibly kidnapped – including all but one of the girls who had been married at the youngest ages. In the majority of kidnappings the boy or young man appears to be primarily culpable, with boys, interested in 'diligent' girls in 'nice dresses', reporting that they and their friends often 'dragged' girls home during Tet. Girls added that significant force was sometimes involved. One, forcibly married at 17, said, '*We were 2-3 girls but we were no match for the boys; the girls lost.*' Interestingly, several girls noted that their now-husbands' family members, had encouraged their kidnappings. One, now 18 but married at 15 to a boy who was an orphan, explained, '*The sister and brother wanted me to be their sister in law, so they told their younger brother to kidnap me. They liked me because I was an orphan; I worked harder than other friends who have parents.*' (Adolescent girl, 18)

Box 9: Bride-kidnapping: an evolving practice

'I was kidnapped by many people. When coming to his house, my husband left me at home and all of his friends went to their homes. According to Mong custom, when I was in front of the main door, they held a chicken and circled three times above my head, then my soul belonged to them, I couldn't return home in the first, second or third day.' (Adolescent girl, married against her will at 15)

'I will be determined not to get married, even if I'm kidnapped. I'm not old enough yet. I will use the excuse that the Government regulates that a girl mustn't get married if she's not old enough; and then if he still insists on marry me, I won't accept and I will go away. There are many girls in the village; if they (men) kidnap me but I refuse, I'll call for help, and everyone will rescue me, that way they won't be able to kidnap me.' (Adolescent girl, 16)

'If she doesn't like me, I can't kidnap her. If I try to kidnap her, she will be in a bad mood and won't love me.' (Adolescent boy, 16)

Tradition in these Hmong villages, which stipulates that once a girl has spent three days in a boy's house she is married to him, explains the persistence of kidnapping (see Box G). Kidnapped girls told us that they saw no way around this tradition; '*I thought that as a girl, if I entered his house and didn't get married with him, the neighbours would say some bad things about me*', explained one 18 year-old married girl. Girls' parents felt similarly constrained and rarely had the chance to intervene as they only found out about the "marriage" once it had happened. One mother said, '*I didn't agree to the marriage. I said that my daughter was in school, I didn't allow the marriage. But the groom's parents said that they had kidnapped her, so marriage was unavoidable*.' Another, whose daughter was '*dragged off by four guys*' during Tet, to marry a man whom she had never met before, added, '*I don't think anything about this tradition; it's the tradition; it was like that before*'. Even boys' parents, who are culpable in that they are often asked for permission before a kidnapping, feel relatively powerless in the face of their sons' desires. As one young man noted, '*parents have to listen to their son*'—otherwise he '*may eat poisonous leaves to kill himself if she is allowed to go*', leaving them without an heir.

Of our girl study participants, only a few were determined that they could not be kidnapped. The vast majority felt that if they were abducted, then they were married. Of our boy study participants, only one, highlighted in Box G, showed any awareness that kidnapping was not a firm foundation for a marriage.

While the majority of adolescents and young adults say that most marriages are contracted by 'dragging' or 'kidnapping', it is clear that this is not in fact the case. Kidnapping *does* exist and is in fact more common than we had assumed, however, based on the way adolescents speak of kidnapping each other, or arranging a kidnapping in advance, it is obvious that most marriages use the traditional kidnapping language, but are not actually contracted by kidnapping. Most young partners are, as T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) note, effectively 'play acting'. As one girl, married at 14, said, '*We met and fell in love with each other on the road, and then he kidnapped me.*' Another girl explained the typical pattern, '*As long as they like each other, they'll go home together. The next day, they'll ask an uncle to bring a bottle of rice wine to the bride's family to inform them. And then on the 4th day, the husband's parents will bring both children to the bride's family and ask them how much money they will take.*'

5.2.4 Bride price

Hmong marriages almost always involve bride-price, with which the groom's family "compensates" the brides' family for the loss of her labour. A health worker explained, '*It's calculated based on the reasoning that my daughter lives with me and works for my family; your family is taking her to work to your family*'. Bride-price has increased rapidly over the last generation[20] (see also Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007). Parents reported that for their marriages it was typically in-kind, involving, for example, '*40 liters of wine and 50 kg of meat*'. Cash is more typical now, and costs appear to be rising. Oldest daughters, married around a decade

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20 Inflationary concerns regarding bride-price can be seen in diasporic Hmong communities as well. For example, clan leaders for the 18 Hmong-American clans just met in 2013 to cap bride-price at $5,000, rather than raise it to $6,000. See:
http://hmongtimes.com/main.asp?SectionID=31&SubSectionID=190&ArticleID=5149&TM=79659.3

ago, typically fetched only 5-6 million VND ($235-$282) whereas now most marriages are contracted for 15-20 million VND ($700-$940).

This difference is primarily attributed by our study participants to broader inflationary trends. One father reported, '*My calculation shows that it (bride price) was more expensive in the past.' He continued, 'In the past everything was cheap, now everything is expensive*.' A Women's Union KI, however, expressed concern that some parents may see today's exorbitant bride price as a reason to encourage their daughters to marry. She said, '*After girls finish grade 9, poor families tell them to get married so that parents can receive an amount of money.*'

Bride-price in Ta Lung is very flexible in regard to both size and timing. One young woman, just married at the age of 17, reported, '*My parents discussed together that they must take 30 million, but after they said that, my husband's parents said they would give 15 million dong only*.' The grandmother of four young girls noted that girls' parents are very aware of what boys' parents can afford to pay and that exceeding that amount will ultimately harm their daughters. She explained, in relationship to her own daughter's marriage, '*the family's situation was difficult, if we had taken too much, our daughter and son-in-law would be faced with difficulties and would have turned to us for help, and would have wanted us to give them (money), so we took only 2 million dong, not more*'. Interestingly, customs in regard to bride price are so flexible that it is acceptable, given poverty, for a young married couple to spend the first several years of their marriage jointly earning the money that will be used to pay her parents. One mother said of her own experience, '*We earned it together; we raised 2 pigs and then sold them to pay for the betrothal gifts*'.

Our study participants were clear that bride price is rarely related to the "worth" of the bride. Whether she is young or old, rich or poor, illiterate or a 12th grade graduate, the price offered to her family is largely dependent on what the groom's family can bear. Indeed, there were only two variances from this theme. One mother in an FGD noted that local boys pay a lower bride price than boys from other communes, because the young couple will be able to more easily contribute labour to the bride's natal family. Another mother noted that 12th grade girls may, in some cases, require a higher bride price not because they are "worth" more, but because they have been unable, as students, to contribute much labour to their parents, who then require compensation for what they missed.

While many blogs produced by the Hmong diaspora argue that bride-price effectively commodifies women and reminds them that they are sold goods without any rights of their own (see also Lemoine, 2012), our study participants did not speak of the practice in that manner. Indeed, while we found no evidence that bride price encourages men to treat women well (Cooper, 1998), we also, like T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011), found no evidence that the Hmong community sees it as a practice in need of abandonment. While it is entirely likely that even the most educated girls would have been unable to conceive of this idea, the flexibility mentioned in regard to the size and timing of bride-price calls its meaning into question – as do the handful of stories regarding parents gifting young couples with the bulk of the funds they received.

5.2.5 Marriage preparations

Clothes are very important to Hmong girls and are the one essential item of their bridal trousseau. While families who are able often buy their daughters other consumer goods, including '*a blanket, mosquito net, the rubber mat, thermos flask and cups, and the wash-cloth*', '*According to the tradition, a suit of clothes and a trunk are enough*' (Mothers in FGDs). What appears to be crucial, across generations, is that the clothing be traditional Hmong clothing. One grandmother broke down crying describing her own wedding clothes, which were not adequate; she sobbed, '*I didn't have clothes to go to my husband's house; I was only wearing a linen outfit; I'm crying thinking of that.*' A mother, who began preparing her own wedding clothes at the age of twelve added, '*I didn't think of marriage, I only thought about nice clothes.*' The continued importance of proper clothing is clear from the priorities of today's unmarried, out-of-school girls, many of whom are very focused on preparing their own clothing. One, raising her own pigs, said, '*I've managed to buy about 6-7 suits of such clothes. Mong people's clothes, nice ones.*'

However, while women and girls are clear that bridal gifts are important, they are equally clear that they are not culturally required – as the Hmong community is all too aware that poverty restricts what many parents *can* provide for their daughters. One mother in an FGD explained, '*They wouldn't sneer or criticize; they*

would just say "let them be; we see they're poor", they wouldn't sneer at them.' Regardless, given the custom of bride price, the onus of funding girls' clothing ultimately falls not on her family, but on his. Another mother in an FGD clarified, '*If you have a daughter… the groom's family will give you wedding presents and you buy some clothes for her.'*

Indeed, boys' families begin preparing for their sons' weddings early – occasionally, when there are many brothers for whom to prepare, when they are as young as six years old. A father in a GP explained that families typically prepare by raising a cow for each son. He said, '*I don't have money, but I have prepared cows for my son's wedding in the future. When he comes home and asks for my permission, I will sell one cow, it will be enough to give the bride's family.'* A mother in an FGD explained that a cow was generally considered sufficient to cover the cost of betrothal gifts, which, as noted above, include clothing; '*The groom's family has to buy a set of clothes for the bride to wear in the first three days and buy another set of clothes to wear when bringing presents to her family after the three days. They have to buy an ethnic dress for her to wear when she is old*[21]*.'*

Although several parents mentioned that they would be shamed if they were unable to provide betrothal gifts, others were clear that the flexibility about the timing and size of bride price takes into account the reality of poverty. For example, while one mother in an FGD said, '*We don't borrow from our family or relatives; they would sneer at us and we would feel ashamed*', another added, '*If the family doesn't prepare the cows for their son, the parents must be very poor indeed. Then they can just let their son get married, and then he will work more to pay the bride's family.'* Families with many sons attempt to control their financial outlay by controlling when their sons marry. A village health worker explained, '*According to Hmong tradition, two brothers can't get married in the same year. The parents would tell the younger son: "your older brother has just got married, we've spent this much, our family has nothing left, so you can't get married in this same year."'*

While T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) found that bride price was often higher in the rare cases of actual forcible kidnapping, our study participants were overwhelmingly agreed that there was no relationship. While one 17-year-old girl commented, '*If he doesn't have enough money, he forces her to marry*', other study participants uniformly confirmed that not only is bride price flexible, but, more importantly, that it still must be paid even if a marriage is made via abduction.

5.2.6 Weddings

According to our study participants, because Hmong marriages are affected by the simple expediency of the bride spending three nights in the groom's home, often after knowing him for only a short time (see also TH Nguyen et al., 2011) wedding ceremonies are unnecessary. In fact, as one father noted, '*Only rich people hold wedding ceremonies*' – though, he continued, it is vital that the chicken ritual be completed: '*When she is taken home, she has to wait outside, a chicken is held and circled three times above their head. It is way to report to our ancestors and family.'*

Picture 8: A photo of a Hmong couple taken during Tet (Lunar New Year)

One young woman, an OCS, noted that the whole idea of weddings is something that is new to the Hmong community. She explained, '*I didn't see weddings like in TV; people in other ethnic groups have weddings, but Mong people never have a wedding.*' She added, however, that she would like to prepare TV weddings for her young son and daughter, when they marry, '*so that they're happier*'.

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[21] One of the important tasks of a woman's marital family is to bury her. A woman's wedding dress is often her burial shroud as well.

While wedding ceremonies are historically rare, families who can afford to do so have long hosted a celebratory meal, even if it wasn't '*called a wedding ceremony*' because the bridal party did not '*take monetary wedding gifts*' (Mother in an FGD). Poorer families invite only their relatives – and the bride's ghost, as a way of letting it know that it is no longer a member of her natal clan. A mother in a GP explained, '*I had moved to my husband's family for 2 weeks….When I came home, there was a funeral, and the ghost was called home for a meal, that was it.*' Another mother, also in a GP, noted that wedding ceremonies are

Picture 9: A Hmong woman feeding her family's buffalo

becoming more common in the last few years, with TV imagery encouraging even long married couples to host larger, more formal, parties. She said, '*10 years after marriage, we held the wedding ceremony. My husband and I worked hard to have a pig to slaughter and wine for the banquet. We invited relatives to enjoy a banquet.*' Indeed, grandparents noted that it is now common to host eight or even ten tables of food and one father said, '*The wedding of my son was better than mine. There were a dish of chicken meat, wine, candy, sticky rice and spring rolls.*'

5.3 Being married

> '*I will let my daughter get married when she is 20 years old. I was too stupid back then.*
> *There is nothing good about being married early.*'
> (Young woman, married for "love" at 14, now 21)

> '*I was a daughter-in-law so I had to bear it, I had to endure hardship and unhappiness.*'
> (17-year-old recently married girl)

5.3.1 The work of wives

The majority of Hmong girls marry voluntarily during late adolescence. Even these girls, however, almost always find that their capacities and opportunities are limited sharply and abruptly by marital expectations. Community consensus regarding what makes a 'good wife' or a 'good husband' (Boxes 11 and 12) explains much about why this is so: a good wife is defined almost exclusively in terms of the work she does for her husband and in-laws. Wives are seen as primarily responsible for childcare, cooking, washing, caring for animals, and gathering firewood. They are also expected to labour alongside their husbands in the fields. On the one hand, this focus on work is not surprising, given that Hmong family livelihoods almost always still rely on subsistence farming. On the other hand, it is very clear that work in Hmong families is far from evenly allocated (see box 10) and that what makes a good husband is all too often merely avoiding the worst vices (see Box 11).

One way to see the primacy of work in wives' lives is through the lens of their mothers' marital advice. Several mothers, when asked how they prepared their daughters for married life responded not with information about sexual and reproductive health, which is where the questions were ostensibly aimed, but with explanations of the work they prepared them to do. For example, one said, '*when my daughters got married, I gave them advice, I taught them from how to sweep the floor, that they should get up early to cook and do housework, and feed the cows and pigs, and then have breakfast and then go to work, to chop firewood, and then come back and cut cow grass.*'

Box 10: Task allocation in Hmong families

Wife	Husband	Daughter	Son
• Transplanting • Sowing • Weeding • Fertilising • Harvesting • Caring for animals • Making wine • Some selling wine and agricultural products • Childcare • Cooking • Washing • Gathering firewood • Chopping firewood • Cleaning house • Making cloth • Embroidery	• Paddy preparation (ploughing field, making holes) • Fertilising • Harvesting • Some cutting firewood • Some selling agricultural products • Some construction work	• Most grass cutting for cows • Helping in the fields • Most firewood collection • Looking after siblings • Cooking	• Some grass cutting for cows • Some firewood collection

Another way to understand wives' work is through the eyes of their brothers and husbands. One boy, now 18 and recently married to a 17-year-old girl, explained, '*My sisters were happier when living with their parents. When living with their husbands' families, they have to work a lot, working hard all day long. They used to have to get up at about 4:30. Now that they're married, they have to get up at a little past 3 o'clock.*' Understanding his sisters' lives does not, however, seem to have opened his eyes to his own wife's experience, as he flatly admitted, '*I just wanted to marry a wife so that she could work to help my parents*'. Another adolescent boy told his wife, '*I don't work, the wife has to do it; you're married to me now, so you have to work for my family.*'

Box 11: The 'good' wife versus the 'good' husband through the eyes of Hmong adolescent girls

'A good wife should try to do housework to make enough for eating and wearing and then nobody can criticise her.'

'A good wife knows how to wash her husband's clothes, cooks three meals a day for him.'

'For a good wife, when friends visit her house, her husband and parents-in-law may be all drunk, she will let them go to rest early, she will entertain the guest and won't go to rest until all of them go home. That is a good wife.'

'A good husband must try to help his family and doesn't gamble so much his neighbours have to criticise.'

'A good husband loves his wife, doesn't drink much wine, doesn't hang around too much, doesn't have love affairs with other women, doesn't gamble.'

'A good husband knows to think for his wife and children. When he's drunk, he sleeps, he doesn't beat his wife. Such men are very rare.'

The allocation of recreation and leisure time also provides a powerful barometer for understanding the position that young wives hold in their marital families. For example, one mother-in-law explained that she expected her daughter-in-law not only to let her sleep in the mornings, but to care for her when she is drunk. She said, '*When her parents-in-law are drunk and cannot get up, if I ask my daughter-in-law to bring us some water, she will also get up to get water for us.*' A girl in an SGD explained that a good wife not only cares for her drunk husband and in-laws, but will even entertain their guests when they become too inebriated to do so. She said, '*when friends visit her house, her husband and parents-in-law may be all drunk, she will let them go to rest early, she will entertain the guest and won't go to rest until all of them go home.*' Girls and women all agreed, however, that their own social needs ceased to be relevant upon marriage. As one summed up, '*I don't have time to hang out with my friends anymore, because I'm a married person now.*'

There are, however, some signs of change – not in terms of what wives do, but in terms of what adolescent boys believe a good husband should contribute to a marriage (see also Box I below). While girls primarily remain focused on the good husband as one who does not drink too much, goes to sleep when he is drunk, and refrains from both gambling and domestic violence, a sizeable minority of boys want to do better than that. They want to work with their wives, even for their wives. They see that more equitable marriages, which some of our OCSs enjoy, tend to be less poor and more joyful. And they acknowledge how rare role models are, particularly in regard to drinking and gender-based violence.

Box 12: The 'good' wife versus the 'good' husband through the eyes of Hmong adolescent boys

'A good wife means that when I get home drunk, she must know how to take care of me, to fetch me water. When I'm sick, she must know how to get medicine for me; that's a good wife.'

'Firstly she must take good care of the family; secondly she should be somewhat hard-working in the fields. And she should not feel reluctant to do housework.'

'I want my wife to be hard working, and obedient, and nice.'

'I want to be a good husband, so that my wife will love me and I will love her. If I am busy, my wife will work more, if my wife is busy, I will work more. If my wife is ill, I cook for her. After cooking for my wife, if I have redundant time, I will go to cut firewood.'

'A good husband doesn't drink much wine, and doesn't revile his wife and children and doesn't beat his children. I want to follow example of those people who don't drink, don't scold. I can't find such people in my hamlet.'

'A good husband must help his wife do housework so that his family is not poor like other people's families. If he doesn't work, and fools around all the time, it won't do his family any good.'

5.3.2 Fertility

The lives of married Hmong women in Ta Lung are also defined in terms of fertility. Girls are expected to have children quickly – many are indeed finished with childbearing in their early twenties – and some, despite declining family size, are expected to continue childbearing until they have produced at least one boy. As one man explained, '*for my ethnic people, if 1 or 2 years after marriage, you don't have babies, you have to adopt children.*'

Picture 10: A young mother nursing her second child

In our year-one research with girls in more centrally located villages, girls were overwhelmingly clear that they wanted no more than two children, and most families had no more than three. Interestingly, this was not the case in the more remote villages in which we worked this year; families were not only larger, but some adolescents expressed a continued interest in eventually having larger families themselves. These patterns appear to be driven not only by son preference, but by *husbands'* son preference – though we note that since boys also tend to marry when they are quite young, their preferences are likely highly reflective of their parents' preferences. One mother of eight, including seven daughters and a youngest son, noted, '*My husband wanted to have a son. When I had 2 children, I insisted on stopping having babies, but my husband wouldn't let me get a contraceptive coil; he wanted to have a son. My husband said after the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th child, if we still didn't have a son then, we would get a contraceptive coil.*' While girls are more certain than boys that the ideal family includes only two children, particularly since they know that they will be fined for a third child, they remain concerned about producing a boy. One girl in an SGD explained, '*If I give birth to two daughters only, no son, my husband won't love me very much.*' Ultimately, as was also noted by Teerawichitchainan et al. (2007), since '*the husband has the greatest decision-making power and is the one to give directions for his wife to do things*', most women appear to accede to their husbands' desires and have children until they have the longed for son.

Younger, unmarried adolescent boys also remain deeply committed to both larger families and sons – though in part this may simply reflect youthful optimism. For example, one 16-year-old explained, '*I want to have 3-4 children. 2 girls, 2 boys.*' Furthermore, even the threat of fines does not appear to dissuade some young men from social norms that venerate sons. Another 16- year-old flatly stated, '*If I have two daughters, I will father the third child to have a son. I will father the third child regardless of the fine.*' There are however limits; an 18- year-old explained, '*I want one son and one daughter. If I have two daughters, I only need one son. If I have three daughters, we don't give birth to the fourth one.*'

There are two main factors contributing to the discrepancy between what girls and boys *want* in terms of family size. First, girls appear to be significantly more willing to listen to family planning messages and follow commune directives. As one young mother explained, '*The commune population and commune committee cadres told me that my family was poor so I should limit the children number to 1 or 2, so I had the ring placed.*' Second, girls, because they have worked side by side with their mothers and have cared for their younger siblings since they were young children themselves, understand the relationship between poverty and family size in a way that many boys do not. A girl in an SGD said, '*I want to have 2 children, so that I can give them full care. In the past, my parents had so many children, they couldn't give them full care.*' Another, married at 17 and the mother of two young boys, added, '*Unknowledgeable people have 2, 3, or 5, 6 or 7 daughters, say that they will give birth until they have a son. But if they give birth to another daughter, they will have too many children and be unable to care for all of them.*' Ironically, her mother has been pushing her to have a daughter, but she has declined. She explained, '*My birth mother said, "How could you give birth to two sons? I would be so great if you had one daughter." I said "Let it be, having 2 sons is fine, too."*'

Picture 11: A girl caring for her younger siblings after school

While contraception is both freely available and heavily encouraged for all married couples, it remains nearly completely absent for unmarried adolescents. Indeed, because sexual activity among the unmarried is considered illicit and adults are concerned that information might encourage experimentation, even information seems to be tightly restricted to those who are married. Only one adolescent girl, whose father happens to be a health worker, said that she had access to information about sexual and reproductive health. She explained, '*I get it from my father, because he also works as a village health worker. I just read the materials that he takes home.*' Other girls, however, are very clear that they know nothing. One, 16 years old, said, '*Hmong people don't speak about it*.' Another, now 20 and still unmarried, explained that while she would like to know more, the topic was culturally off-limits; '*To me, I think I should know, but to Hmong people, such things are sensitive, so we don't tell anyone, nor do we hear anyone talk about it.*' When pressed by our research team about whether some instruction might be a good thing, especially for girls about to be married, mothers in one SGD laughed. '*Nobody teaches; we don't teach our daughters anything,*' said one. Another added, '*They don't need any instruction from adults. Teachers don't teach about menstruation or contraceptive methods. I think that it is not needed. They will teach themselves.*'

Indeed, while teachers told us that that some information regarding puberty was offered to students at school, they were clear that not only was the proffered content directed solely at biology, rather than the larger field of sexuality, but also that it was directed purely at puberty – helping children understand their '*changing bodies*' – and not actually at reproduction and contraception.

Because Hmong couples tend to have their children soon after marriage, the larger community tends to utilize forms of contraception that are not amenable to the short-term, spur-of-the-moment way in which adolescents would need them. Most women use IUDs to space their children or to prevent further pregnancies after they are finished with childbearing. Not only are IUDs an all but impossible choice for girls – as their use would imply planning ahead in a context in which that type of planning is deeply taboo – but they are simply not available. The health worker explained, '*If (a girl) is not married but wants to use a contraceptive coil, she is not allowed to use it*'[22]. He continued, '*Even if she wants to see a guy intimately, they must use condoms.*' That said, another health worker said, '*No one in the commune uses condoms*'. He explained that not only

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[22] It is unclear whether the unavailability of IUDs is related to medical or cultural preferences. In many countries they are—or have been until recently—seen as inappropriate for nulliparous women.

was the condom training information provided in public, by a Kinh official using a translator, but that it was directed at older adults and centered around HIV protection. Besides, he added, '*Girls are too shy to ask about contraception – they only ask their husbands.*'

5.3.3 Obstetric care

Among our study participants it appears that women in more remote villages may be very unlikely to receive any sort of obstetric care. As one health worker noted, '*I think here people rarely go for pregnancy check-ups, and when giving birth, 70% deliver at home.*' Even that figure may be high; of our study participants, only one woman had both her children in the hospital. The others delivered at home and were attended, as is customary, by their husbands and mothers, mothers-in-law or sisters.

> '*I gave birth in the Meo Vac hospital. I went there because my husband told me to go there. My acquaintances don't like the hospital. If they give birth in the hospital, doctors will tell them to undress, so they are too shy to go there.*'
>
> (24-year-old mother of two)

There appears to be a variety of reasons that explain why women choose traditional birth practices – some practical, some not. First, as one father noted, '*The road is bad so it takes about 2 hours on foot, and 1.5 hours by bike.*' While this geographical reality makes ante-natal care difficult, particularly towards the end of pregnancy, it all but precludes clinic delivery. Second, as is highlighted by the quote above, Hmong women tend to be very private about their bodies and are often uncomfortable disrobing in front of strangers, even doctors. Third, as noted by the health worker, Hmong customs regarding the treatment of newborns dictate that they must not go outside for the first month of their lives. He explained, '*The difficult thing is that in our Hmong ethnic group, we are only allowed to bring a baby outside 1 month after he/she's born. If a baby is born at the commune, he/she must stay there. That's the problem.*' Finally, there appears to be at least some misunderstanding about the benefits and costs of a hospital delivery, with at least one young mother convinced that it causes more pain[23]. She told us, '*If I gave birth in the hospital, I would suffer the pain for more than a day, if I gave birth at home, the pain would last for 2 or 3 hours only.*' Given the attitudes of some health workers, one of whom announced, when asked why Hmong women do not avail themselves of clinics, '*This ethnic people are silly*', it seems unlikely that attitudes are likely to shift soon.

5.3.4 Gender-based violence

In this case echoing Lemoine (2012), we noted in our year-one research that alcohol-fueled gender-based violence remains endemic in Ta Lung—with grave repercussions for Hmong women. Alcohol is a significant feature of Hmong culture. Many women and adolescent girls earn cash by brewing and selling fortified wine and the majority of men regularly participate in drinking ceremonies

> '*If I have too many children when my husband beats me, I won't know where to hide.*'
>
> (15-year-old unmarried girl)

with their neighbours. Drunkenness is not, however, gender-specific. While men appear to be significantly more likely than women to become drunk—and to spend more time in that state-- older women, who already have daughters-in-law to handle day-to-day labour, also appear to be regularly inebriated.

Drunken violence is so pervasive in the villages in which we worked that a good husband, as was noted earlier, is seen as the one who sleeps when he is drunk – rather than beating his wife. Indeed, adolescent girls and young women see wife-beating as a totally normal part of Hmong life. One, now 23 years old, said, '*Along this circular rocky mountain range, it is normal.*' Another young mother added, '*Many people beat their wives often. The reason is that they drink all the time*'. Girls in this round of research, like those from last year, tried to protect their mothers from the abuse that happens '*only once or twice a week*'. One, in an SGD, explained, '*If he comes home and beats her, I tell her to run away and I stay there, I am his child, so he doesn't beat me, I tell my mother to run away.*'

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23 It should be noted that where hospitals are associated with higher-risk and caesarian deliveries, it may well be the case that hospital deliveries cause more pain.

> *'It wasn't wrong of my husband to scold me; it was because I didn't know how to give birth; I gave birth to only girls.'*
>
> (Mother, age 42)

As was noted earlier, girls are very aware that their futures are fairly likely to include gender-based violence and take care when choosing a partner to minimize their future risk. Some merely try to choose carefully. Others deliberately delay marriage. An unmarried 19-year-old explained that she did not want to marry any time soon because she was '*Afraid of an alcoholic husband*'; she continued, '*I want to stay with my mother for a long time.*' A tiny handful of women appear to totally eschew marriage in order to ensure that they will never be beaten by a drunken husband. One 40-year-old woman in the most remote village, who was well known to all of our study participants, reported that she had chosen to never marry '*because some married women are often beaten and tortured by their husbands, so she didn't want to get married.*'

Box 13: Domestic violence: a deeply entrenched practice

> '*I won't do anything and I can't do anything. In such situation, I am not able to beat him, so I keep silent, let him beat me if he wants.*' (24-year-old married woman)
>
> '*When the husband shouts at you, you should endure it and don't talk back; you just need to go to work.*' (20-year-old unmarried woman)
>
> '*You shouldn't tell anyone, because it is the matter of husband and wife, if you tell someone, they will say that your husband is not good and they will criticize your family.*' (Adolescent girl in SGD)
>
> '*I don't dare report; if I reported to the village head or secretary, my husband would beat me more*'. (Grandmother)
>
> '*When returning to mother's home, she scolded me and asked: "Do you think that marriage is so simple? Do you think that you are a child and if you don't want to marry him, you can return home and you are still a soul in this family? No, it is not true, you go away.'* (24-year-old married woman)
>
> '*If I didn't teach my daughters-in-law properly, my husband said, "if you don't teach your daughters-in-law properly, I will beat you first, and you both later."'* (Grandmother)
>
> '*Officials don't dare punish them when a husband beats the wife; it's due to their family. If a husband is fined 500,000 dong for beating his wife, where can he find money to pay? He will have to take it from the money of both husband and wife.*' (KI from the Women's Union)

Even some adolescent boys understand girls' fears. A 17-year-old boy, unusually in 11th grade, reported, '*Men often drink quite a lot of alcohol. Women are afraid that men may hit them if they drink alcohol.*' Another, a 16-year-old orphan who left school in 7th grade, added, '*Girls are scared that the heavy drinkers will beat them. Oh, there are so many here.*' Unfortunately, many of their unmarried peers are already planning to be not victim-advocates, but perpetrators – and are able to enumerate the reasons for which they might beat their future wives. As Lemoine (2012) observed, most of those reasons ultimately related to 'restoring his male – manliness – pride' (10). For example, one young man said that he would beat his wife if she even talked to another man after they were married.

Women have remarkably few options for dealing with gender-based violence, because anything other than total submission risks escalation and social embarrassment (see Box J). They cannot hit back. They cannot talk back. They cannot tell their neighbors. They cannot report the violence to officials. Because their souls have been claimed by their husbands' clans, they cannot return on a long-term basis to their parents' house. Many, due to the patriclocal residence patterns which place them in other villages or even other communes, cannot escape to their parents' house for a temporary respite. Additionally, while a sympathetic father-in-law may be able to offer some small level of protection, kind-hearted mothers-in-law are unable to assume that role, due to their own position in the household. Finally, while gender-based violence is illegal, KIs

acknowledge that they have no effective way to punish perpetrators, because fines ultimately harm the victim as much as they do the perpetrator.

A handful of study participants noted that as pervasive as gender-based violence continues to be, '*it decreases much over the last 5 years*' (Women's Union KI). A Women's Union KI reported that in part this is because neighbors come to help when they hear screams. She said, '*When they hear the fighting and crying, they will run there to help.*' Grandmothers, however, were more inclined to agree with a commune level KI, who noted that the largest reason for the decline is the end of arranged marriage. He explained, '*Mostly people became better aware of this issue when seeing their sons didn't love their wives and beat them, they felt deep mercy and knew that their arranged married didn't succeed.*' One grandmother also noted the close links between child marriage and gender-based violence. She explained, '*Those girls who get married at the age of 15 and their husbands at the age of 17 are often beaten by their husbands.*'

Box 14: When one's best is not good enough

Ly Thi My* **is a 27-year-old married mother of one whose life demonstrates what intelligence and hard work can do for a Hmong woman—and what it cannot do.**

My's adolescence was much like those of her peers. She left school at the end of 9th grade and was shortly thereafter kidnapped by her husband. She, like the other kidnapped wives in our research, '*didn't dare to return home*' as she knew that her neighbours would see her as already married- and thus unmarriageable - if she left.

When her husband left home for an extended period of time, after promising her that he would shortly return, she tried to return to her mother, who '*let me stay there, but didn't hold any ritual of any kind, which meant that she didn't allow my soul to be admitted back to her family.*' Indeed, My reported, '*When I helped my mother to work on the field, she said, "Go to your husband's house. If you stay here, even if you work for me, I won't calculate your contribution."*' She continued, '*I was so angry at her speech, I went to his home that evening.*'

Eventually, because she was judged to be clever and good with the Kinh language, My was invited by the commune to finish 12th grade at the Continuing Education Centre.

Now employed in several official capacities, some of which are elected and others of which are appointed, she has an enviable income of her own. She has used that income to put her husband, who also left school after lower secondary school, through both upper secondary school and college. She said, '*I calculated that 700,000 dong was enough for me and the child to eat. I allocated my monthly salary for him to study.*'.

Her husband, however, used his time away from her to do more than study. My explained, '*He took many photographs with his girlfriends.*'

On the one hand, My is a study in what a Hmong woman can be when she is fiercely determined, unafraid of scandal and willing to work very hard. When her husband scolded her for working late, she told him, '*I couldn't go home when I hadn't fulfilled my task, because I was elected by people. Why did they elect me? Did they elect me so that I evaded my duty? I would be a waste of public money.*' When he continued she dared to point out, '*Ok, you can scold me because I am an official. I will find a job for you and later I will repeat the same sentence to you, let you see how humiliated you will feel.*'

On the other hand, My's words provoke her husband and she, like many of her peers, is ultimately forced into submission. She explained, '*frankly, if he raises his hand intending to beat, it is my fault when I am inattentive and speak too much.*'

My is still full of dreams, but she keeps them to herself. She told our research team, '*You are the first one who I told my dream, I haven't told anyone else. Because I think that if my dream is possible to come true, I will tell other people. Unsympathetic people may say that "The kind of people like you dares to dream, you swimming upstream". I will feel humiliated, so I don't want to tell anybody.*'

* We have chosen in all cases to use pseudonyms to ensure the privacy of our respondents.

5.3.5 Divorce

Study participants were clear that '*Hmong people don't divorce*' (Commune level KI). While adolescent girls thought it might be possible if '*both the husband and wife are officials*', for "normal" Hmong people divorce is simply not an option because, as was noted earlier, '*according to Hmong tradition, once you stepped out of the door, you could never look back*' (Mother) (see also Lemoine, 2012 and Moua, 2003).

There are a variety of reasons that Hmong families believe that divorce is not an option. First, because their souls are seen as belonging to their husband's clan, any potential remarriage may not only anger their ancestors, but invite death. One girl, now 17 but kidnapped at 15, told us that she had been desperate to leave her husband and return to both her grandparents and school. She did not, however, because '*if I abandoned the husband's house and divorced him and later I would get married with another husband, I wouldn't live long*'.

Second, children complicate women's decision-making. A commune level KI, himself Hmong, said that even if a Hmong woman could gather the courage to leave her husband, she will almost certainly not do so, since she cannot take her children away from their clan. He explained, '*If they manage to escape, they can't bring the children with them. That's why women live under great pressure and they have to accept. That's the psyche of Hmong people that was passed down from ancient generations.*' A young mother further noted that even if a woman did take her children with her—doing so would effectively render them nameless, which would be deeply shameful for both her and them. She said, '*Hmong people say that after the divorce, the husband will marry another wife and he won't provide for our children …The children can't bear the family name of the husband. They can't bear the family name of my blood parents, so the children don't have family name.*'

> '*Under the custom of Mong people, the wife must follow her husband as the boat is steered by the oar. Once you got married…you bear the husband's family name when you are young or old, you are alive or dead, and you still bear the family name.*'
>
> (commune level KI)

Divorce also runs into practicality issues. Because few Hmong women have any way of supporting themselves except farming, and Hmong inheritance totally bypasses girls in favour of their brothers, divorced women effectively have no way of supporting themselves. A few are no doubt allowed by their parents to stay in '*tiny*' houses on their parents' property, but as they are unable to enter the main house or kitchen— and many natal families cannot afford to feed another mouth--most divorced women find that they have no choice except to acquire a new husband—which our study participants said is practically impossible.

Picture 13: A house with a stone wall

Highlighting the difference between injunctive norms, what people *ought* to do, versus descriptive norms, what people actually do, three of our young study participants are divorced (one of the girls was previously married to one of the boys) and another three mentioned knowing girls who had left their husbands. In all cases the "divorce" was not called a divorce and had occurred before pregnancy. Girls were said to have '*left her husband*' or '*gone back to her mother*'. Most critically, and in line with Lemoine's (2012) observations, it appears that when husbands tell their wives to leave, doing so is considered acceptable, even to their 'reallocated ghosts'.

In the case of the divorced couple the boy kidnapped the girl against her will when she was only 17. She felt trapped in the marriage—but upheld her end of the traditional bargain and stayed with him to work for his family. His parents paid the requisite betrothal gifts, which totaled more than 30 million VND. Only a few months after the wedding, however, he fell in love with someone else and told her to go home. When she refused, he beat her. She explained, '*My husband got someone else, so he must beat and shout at his wife. "I don't marry you anymore, go back to your mother; if you don't go, I must beat you". He shouted, and beat (me), he kicked me with his foot, while slapped me with his hand.*' She continued, '*I went back to my mother right after he beat me. When I got home, my parents said "Your husband doesn't love you but your parents-in-law love you, you should go back."*' Her in-laws, however, were so embarrassed by the behaviour of their son that not only did they not ask her to come back, they let her family know that they could keep the betrothal gifts. Even better, she said, '*My parents agreed I could stay with them.*'

Our other divorced study participant is a young woman, age 20. She married a lowlander, which is very unusual (see Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007), when she temporarily left the commune, which is also very unusual, even for a young man but particularly for a young woman. Although his family had already brought betrothal gifts to her family, she decided after only a few weeks that the marriage was not viable. She invited his family to a meal, explained the situation and returned their gifts. She related: '*so I made a decision -it's happened like that anyway, I can't stay there; we'll cook a meal and invite his family here to talk and get things straight; now that we can't live with each other, it shouldn't be forced, and I will return the betrothal gifts to them.*' While she now considers herself unmarriageable, she is happy with her choice as she felt there was no way for her, as a literate woman, to live with an illiterate man with whom she had nothing in common.

5.3.6 Remarriage

Remarriage, according to our study participants, is a necessity for a widow without a son, because without a son she will have no one to care for her in her old age. This unspoken rule has a several negative impacts on girls and women. First, it almost always means that women and children are separated from one another, as few women are able take their children with them upon remarriage. Since children "belong" to their father and his family, most paternal orphans are left with their paternal grandparents or a paternal uncle. As "orphans", few are prioritized for education in those already stressed households and most report even heavier workloads than non-orphaned children. A few paternal orphans, always girls – since they are destined to become members of their marital families in any case – are raised by their remarried mothers, which can also be to their detriment (see Box 15).

> '*The mother is sorry for her daughter, but she has to accept it, she can't do anything, even if the daughter's husband dies and the daughter returns home, she is allowed to live a tiny house like this one.*'
>
> (Mother in FGD)

Of the seven paternal orphans among our study participants, six were raised, at least initially, by their father's families. The two girls who lived with their grandparents indicated that they were poor, but loved. The two boys raised by their uncles both left school before completing lower-secondary school, because they felt obliged to begin repaying their uncles for raising them as soon as possible. Neither reported abuse. The two young women who were raised by their paternal uncles, however, both reported very significant abuse. One, now 23, but orphaned as a toddler, said, '*When I came home from school, he was drunk and gave my food to the pig, so I had nothing to eat. He was heavily drunk, didn't give us food and beat me.*' She was ultimately taken in by a neighbor, who took '*pity*' and '*treated me as his own child*'. Her younger sister was raised by the neighbor's brother. Another young woman, who lived as a child with both her uncle and her paternal grandmother, reported that even though her grandmother '*cooked for me*', her '*uncle didn't let me eat*'.

Box 15: A mother's love is not enough

Giang Thi Tua is a 67-year-old grandmother who was widowed when she was only 25. Because both of her children were girls, she said, 'I *had to marry my second husband; if I had had one daughter and one son, I wouldn't have remarried. Otherwise when I grew old there wouldn't be anyone to take care of me, no one to support me*.'

When she remarried, she took both of her daughters with her, as her '*former parents-in-law were already getting old*' and she was '*feared they wouldn't have been able to raise them*.'

The first sign of trouble was from her new in-laws. Though her husband was supportive of her girls, '*his parents said "these children are not my son's children, so I don't love them"*'. Because as the daughter-in-law she was unable to gainsay their rules, she said '*even when there was rice in the house, I didn't dare to cook for them*'.

First, she '*carried one of them to the previous parents-in-law, saying "parents, I've brought my kids there, but they don't love them, I feel sorry for them. I'm carrying my child here so that you can raise her; you'll love her more*."'

Unfortunately, her children's grandparents would not take them. They said '"*we're too old already*' and told her '*you're their mother… you should try to bring your children there and bring them up*'.

After she gave birth to a son for her new husband, he too began treating her girls badly. She said, '*when I was out working, he also went out to drink and got drunk before coming home. He didn't love my children so he kept scolding them.*'

Both of Mrs Giang's daughters, now mothers themselves, chose to marry late in order to minimize their risks of marrying a drunk.

6 Persistent norms, changing norms

Picture 14: Children waiting for free clothes donated by a woman from Hanoi

Norms are messy—particularly gender norms, which are both pervasive, popping up in unexpected places and unfolding in unpredictable ways, but also silent, because few of us, carefully socialized since birth, are even able to see the ways in which they shape our lives (Boudet et al., 2012). Norm change is also messy, as descriptive norms tend to change far faster than injunctive norms, largely because they 'typically do not involve social sanctions for noncompliance (Lapinski and Rimal, 2005: 130), and norm shifts in one area are often offset by norm retrenchment in others, particularly for those norms related to gender (Boudet et al, 2012). Where the norms of different reference groups tend to overlap, as is the case with son preference in both the Hmong community and the larger Vietnamese culture, they are likely to be particularly sticky—especially since both cultures emphasise collective interests over those of individuals. On the other hand, where legal change can rapidly effect a "tipping point", altering beliefs about what is "normal" because it has already altered behaviour, change may come more quickly (Mackie and Le Jeune, 2009).

As was mentioned earlier, Hmong adolescent girls are located in a rather singular nexus – as they are simultaneously influenced by a one-party state, a rapidly developing Asian culture and a comparatively insulated ethnic minority. Evidence of this singularity, and the messiness that it is engendering, can be seen in the lives of almost all the adolescents and young adults we interviewed, as they concurrently hold both

"modern" and "traditional" beliefs and seem untroubled by their contradictory natures. It can also be seen in the way in which some changes, like improved access to education, which *ought* to be encouraging more "modern" gender roles and equitable marriage practices, may instead be reinforcing traditional patterns.

6.1 What drives change?

There are a variety of features working to change the norms that shape Hmong marriage practices and girls' lives. These include top-down mobilization, a growing engagement with "modernity" and the emergence of the first "accessible" role models.

6.1.1 Top-down mobilisation

'If children drop out at the 7th or 8th grade, the parents will be punished. If the family doesn't have money, parents will pay with their labour – by doing construction work or carrying rocks or so.' (Adult in FGD)

'If I am not fined, I will give birth to the third child.' (23-year-old mother of a daughter)

The government of Viet Nam, as was noted earlier, controls not only the law, but also community messaging. Impacts of both are clear among our study participants, who not only can cite the law with ease, but also continuously echo messaging themes. This top-down mobilisation is having, at times, significant impacts on the norms that shape girls' lives.

6.1.2 Early Marriage

KIs indicated that they have been working hard to communicate and implement the law, which prohibits the marriage of girls under 18 and boys under 20. In addition to fines of '*500,000 to 1 million*' (Women's Union KI), the Women's Union works to explain the law to women and schools and the Young Pioneers work to explain it to children (teacher). Given that 'the act of early marriage is a tradition that has been woven into the fibres of Hmong culture', the largest part of those efforts is directed at helping the Hmong community understand *why* it is best to abandon child marriage (Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011: 146). Messages are twofold and are carefully constructed with Hmong reality in mind. Some revolve around the health of mothers and babies and others around helping people understand that older parents with more education are less likely to be poor. KIs reported that this messaging – and the threat of fines – has been highly effective in the commune's more central villages, some of which have not seen a single case of child marriage in several years. In more remote villages, however, progress has been slow.

'Last year the headman in another village held an undercover wedding ceremony for his son and daughter-in-law despite the intervention. The authority fined them 2 million dong. The fine was paid. Because he was the headman'

(Women's Union KI)

One reason for this appears to be that fines are rarely issued and are often smaller than some KIs report, at least in these more remote villages. A mayor, for example, admitted 'Once they got married, several hundred thousand [VND] doesn't matter'. Indeed, members of one FGD were able to think of only one case in which a fine had been successfully levied. The main reason for this appears to be reporting. Those who had taken advantage of Hmong custom, and merely moved in with one another to establish their marriage, explained that they simply waited until they were of legal age to report their marriage to the commune. While KIs know that these marriages are taking place, they most often find out about them weeks or even months after they are a fait accompli, at which point they see little value in fining an already established couple. Because there are so many cases where 'We didn't register our marriage. Nobody said anything, we were not fined' (Adolescent girl married against her will at 15), adolescents have learned that in this regard the law has no teeth. As one man in an FGD explained, 'the authority said that they would impose fine, but no fine was imposed, so people still got married early'.

Even where commune authorities hear about an underage marriage in advance and attempt to intervene, it appears that some adolescents choose not to listen. One boy, married at 18 to a 17-year-old girl, ignored the

wishes of both his parents and local authorities. He explained, 'My parents said that they were afraid the girl was still too young, so I shouldn't rush it. But I wanted to have someone to work with me to help my parents, so I said I would get married.' He continued, 'The Party's secretary and the village head did tell me that I was not old enough'; they explained that we were too young to work well and that in the end we would 'make my parents suffer more'. He concluded, 'When I didn't listen to what they said, they said "suit yourself, up to you if you want to get married, it's up to you what you think."'

On the other hand, while the impact of fines appears tenuous at best, it is clear from our study participants that, on average, messaging is making in-roads into community beliefs about child marriage, particularly with the more mature adolescents, and their parents. Many of our study participants made statements such as '*My wife is 21. I think that if I married a younger girl with an underdeveloped body, my baby would be malnourished, unable to grow and slow to develop. I learned it when I was in school*' (young man in FGD). Others focused on poverty and women's health: '*At the age of 18, many people are jobless*' (17-year-old boy); '*If she gets married at the age of 20, she will not be as poor and she will give birth more comfortably*' (24-year-old mother). While the reasoning varies – and includes parents who manage to sell the idea of waiting on the basis of the ephemeral nature of adolescent crushes – it is clear that most study participants' thinking has genuinely changed (see the quote in the box above).

> '*During my summer vacation of grade 9, a friend of mine told me to get married, and I responded that I wouldn't do that and let him get married before I do. My father said that if I got married now, I would suffer later and he advised me not to get married now. He said that after I finished schooling, I will have an opportunity to work for the commune, and it's not late to get married then. If I get married now, it probably won't be good later; moreover, I may like the wife now but I may not like her later.*'
>
> (17-year-old boy)

6.1.3 Family size

There is also, as was noted earlier, a very strong push by the Government to limit family size. Driven by concerns about overpopulation and associated land fragmentation, the government has not only made contraception free for all Vietnamese families, but has again carefully crafted messages for the Hmong community about how smaller families require less work, are less poor and are better for women's health. As a health worker explained, '*We promote that if women have fewer children, they won't have to work as hard, and it will be better for their health as well.*' He admits that uptake in the older generation has been spotty at best, with some women telling him '*I give birth to my kids; I'm the one to raise them, not you, why are you encouraging me to use contraception?*' A Women's Union KI has higher hopes for the younger generation. She reported, '*The child limitation has been introduced since 2011-2012 and applied for newlywed couples only, only then the state limits the number of children to 1 or 2.*'

It is clear from our study participants, some of whom admittedly continue to express a preference for larger, son-centred families, that overall messaging is having an impact on desired family size as well. The poverty that continues to stalk Hmong families seems to be key to the majority of uptake, with some women even clear that they would prefer to have only one son, so that they will not have to further divide their property, thus reducing farm yields. As one woman in an FGD explained, '*I say that you give birth and you raise them, but the problem is that humans can give birth, but land can*'t.'

As evidenced by the experiences of other Asian countries, however, and indeed the larger Vietnamese culture, a smaller family is not always best for girls and women—as in some cases it is encouraging prenatal sex selection. While Hmong families lack the financial resources that would enable prenatal sex selection and have no history of female infanticide, it will bear watching to see if women bear the blame in the son-less households that will soon become more common.

Thao Thi Dung is an 18-year-old mother of two whose life highlights the way in which norms are shifting unevenly, with kidnapped child brides unable to resist marriage, but finding unlikely allies in regard to family planning.

A paternal orphan who was raised with her younger sister by her maternal grandparents after her mother fled to China to escape a violent second husband, Dung was unable to complete even lower secondary school. Her grandfather tried several times when she was a child to get the commune to support her education, as the family was so poor they were often hungry. Despite backing from the hamlet, however, '*the commune didn't do it*' and she was forced to leave school in 7th grade. It was only after she left that '*the teachers asked why I didn't go to school and my classmates said that I was an orphan.*'

Abducted for marriage at 15, by a 17-year-old boy, Dung reported that her '*grandparents told me that if I got married for two days only and became a soul in their family, if I abandoned the husband's house ... I wouldn't live long.*' She stayed, even though both she and her grandparents felt that she was far too young for marriage.

Despite its rocky start, Dung is happy with her married life. She and her husband don't quarrel and, unusually, her husband supports family planning. '*He said that our family was poor, so we should limit the children number, son or daughter, to two,*' she explained.

Dung's main worry is her children's future. Though they have little land and struggle to feed themselves, Dung reported that that they are '*not listed as a poor household*' because '*the [commune] investigation team is not in close touch.*' Unfortunately, with recent policy changes stipulating that only children officially designated as 'poor' are eligible, despite their ethnicity, for school fee waivers, it will be difficult for Dung to guarantee her children the full education that she has long valued.

7.1.4 Schooling

Education is one area in which top-down mobilisation has been a runaway success, altering not only what girls do, but what their communities and families believe they *ought* to do, in the space of a single generation. Indeed, not only are girls now overwhelmingly likely to complete 9th grade, but they are outperforming their male peers. How these educational gains will interact with marriage practices, however, remains far from clear.

The government has taken a four-pronged approach to encouraging Hmong children to complete 9th grade. First, the national government has heavily invested in educational infrastructure. As was noted earlier, all hamlets in the commune have both a kindergarten and a satellite school and the commune itself has its own lower secondary

Picture 15: Second-graders on their way home after school

school, for children, and continuing education centre, for older learners. This represents remarkable progress given that many parents in their mid-20's remain illiterate because there were no schools when they were children. The national government has also, until 2013, provided generous subsidies that render education through 9th grade free for all Hmong children. Given that educational user fees are quite high in Viet Nam, significantly compromising the value of purported tuition free schooling, especially for the poorest minorities

(London, 2012; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2007), these subsidies, which have covered not only school supplies and exam fees but also meals, have been crucial.

Third, the Ta Lung commune fines parents when their children are absent. Fines are 20,000 VND for the first day and 50,000 VND for the third day. While schools are cognizant of parents' need for their children's labour, and are willing to negotiate with them for planned absences, unexcused absences are met with cash fines for those who can afford them—and requisite public work for those who cannot. Teachers explained that because fathers are the head of the household, it is they, and not mothers, who are made to clean the school grounds when their children are absent. These policies have not only served to reduce truancy, but have also, according to teachers, begun to have significant impact on school quality, as students who are present are consistently learning.

Finally, Ta Lung is using messaging to convince children to invest in their own educations, juxtaposing for them the poverty of their parents with the potential salaries of commune officials. A teacher explained, 'We showed them examples, '*your parents didn't go to school in the past, so they have to work in the fields all year round, and they have only corn and cabbage to eat'. We showed them some good examples of commune officials, who had proper education and have proper jobs and salaries, and now they're married and have a wealthy life, having rice and meat to eat every day.*'

> *'Parents don't let their children go to school; that means they're irresponsible for their children.'*
>
> (Adult in FGD)

With very few exceptions, children and parents are sold on the notion of schooling—at least through 9th grade, the end of lower secondary school. They believe that both literacy and fluency in Vietnamese are crucial, primarily so that they will not be cheated when doing business or '*looked down on by other ethnic people*' (Man in FGD). As one grandmother explained, '*Those who finish high school will be better in doing business, because when they go out in society, if people swear at them in the official language, they will understand; otherwise it would be tough for them*.' A 24-year-old woman explained that education is useful even in day-to-day Hmong life; she said, '*Uneducated people are short of many things and don't understand many things ranging from child raising to house tidying, and they don't know even very small things. Their corn-growing technique is worse than mine*.' Perhaps the clearest evidence of genuine norm change can be seen in the words of a young mother, who said that schooling was the key to a future where the sun '*shines bright always.*'

> *'A 9th grader may not find a job. A 12th grader can find it more easily. Make more money. Equipped with knowledge, she will make more money.'*
>
> (Young man, FGD)
>
> *'No land to cultivate. That's why I want my husband to study, he can't work for hire for the rest of his life, income from it is very low, just enough to feed him alone, not enough to provide for all the family.'*
>
> (Young mother)
>
> *'Comparing girls in grade 9 and grade 12, the girl in grade 12 will have the chance to become chief of women union branch and be able to persuade unaware people. That's her advantage.'*
>
> (Young man FGD)
>
> *'Now you should send girls to school for high education, so that they can find decent paid jobs and they don't have to work hard on the field. Girls should go to school until they are 23. They should reach higher secondary school and then intermediate vocational training.'*
>
> (Young woman FGD)

Girls' education also enjoys broad support – at least through 9th grade. Parents know that schooling will protect their daughters from social stigma, increase their odds of finding a job and improve their business skills. Many also believe that education will ultimately make them better wives and mothers. One mother in a FGD, for example, said, '*I'd rather my daughter continue her studies than stay home and get married. She would be wiser, and have intelligence and brains to do business.*' A father added, the girl who completes her education '*will have an advantage in looking for a job*'. Girls and young women are very aware of how different their lives are from those of their mothers. One, when asked how going to school had changed her life, exclaimed, '*Now I can't imagine what I would have become without going to school.*' As noted earlier, girls are taking advantage of every educational opportunity they get; even boys are aware that '*The girls try harder and do better in school, the boys often repeat class because they often chat in the class, so they can't understand lectures, and they don't try hard to study*' (16-year-old boy).

While most girls cannot conceive of a world that includes more than a 9th grade education, since they know that their '*parents had little manpower at home*', their '*younger brothers needed to continue their studies*', '*nobody cares for my younger siblings*', and '*we don't have firewood to cook*', a growing minority want the opportunity to complete their high school educations. However, as noted by a teacher, although '*Girls always outdo boys, at the end of the 9th grade, more boys continue their studies than girls. The girls want to go to school, but their parents don't let them, so they have to accept it.*' Indeed, while there is increasing community support for boys' continued schooling, with even grandmothers keenly aware that it represents the only route to a salaried life, officials told us that no girls in the most remote hamlets had yet managed to complete upper secondary school—and only a few were even enrolled. Unlike the more central hamlets in which we worked last year, upper secondary school appears to remain rare even for boys, in part because of the cost and distance involved, but also because they are less interested in school than girls. While a few of our study participants were adolescent boys who were deeply committed to their own educations, for the larger part, key informants and girls agreed that when boys took school seriously they did so *for* their parents – whereas girls were inclined to excel for themselves and, given their workloads, *despite* their parents. Given, however, that young parents show significantly more support than older adults for both higher education and girls' higher education, these differences may moderate over time.

Teachers and commune officials are worried, however, that recent policy changes will slow increases in educational uptake. Whereas until last year all Hmong students received stipends to offset educational costs, Decree 49, implemented in the fall of 2013, has now limited some of those stipends to Hmong children who are on the official poor list. This could, noted a teacher, have devastating consequences for enrolment: '*if we ask them to pay money, the students will never go to school*'. A commune level official also expressed reservations, as he believes that since the Hmong do not have a long history of educational involvement, this policy change will serve to weaken the commitment of the poor. He said, '*the simplest, most uniform, relevant and effective policy is that all children, rich or poor, near or far, can enjoy equal support for school – so that all of the families can see that they have equal interests in school.*' While the commune is hoarding school supplies and used textbooks, to distribute for free to those who cannot afford them, local officials are unsure how long discretionary funds will hold out.

Disappointingly, for those who see girls' education as a developmental panacea, the rapid progress made towards getting girls into school is not mapping neatly onto progressive shifts in marriage practices. Indeed, even the concrete relationship between educational attainment and marriage practices is nearly as mixed as the relationship between educational and marriage-related norms.

On the one hand, there is at least a correlation between the end of *child* marriage and growing community commitment to 9th grade completion. Except in the case of bride-kidnapping, compulsory schooling does keep the youngest adolescents from getting married. On the other hand, there is some evidence that schooling is encouraging the early marriage of 16- and 17-year-olds. As pre-marital sexual relationships are strictly taboo, and marriage is a contract easily and quickly made, adults are concerned that some adolescents are choosing to marry school mates as soon as they leave school and are forced into the relatively solitary, comparatively boring lives of farmers. For example, one mother reported, '*Now the children…go to school and then meet each other in class, and then they get married.*' A health worker added, '*When a girl goes to school and sees a handsome boy, she will marry him.*' While it would be easy to dismiss these statements as the generalised concerns of adults who see their way of life changing, particularly given statistical changes in

the average age of first marriage, at least one adolescent thought their concerns might have some credence. An 18-year-old boy explained, '*In grade 9, a girl makes friend with a boy and after finishing grade 9, they will get married. One month after grade 9, boys and girls get married.*' A Women's Union KI, however, noted that this is hardly a surprising choice – as adolescents have nothing else to do. '*After leaving school, they have only one option: that is to get married,*' she explained.

While marriage only very rarely keeps girls out of school, since nearly all girls are out of school before they are married, it is usually the case that if a married girl wanted to go to school, she would not be allowed to do so by her husband and his family, who require her to work at home. This is not the case for boys, most of whom, according to a commune level KI, return to school after an early marriage. He said, '*The boys have no problems at all, only 10% of them drop out, 90% continue going to school. For the girls, only 10% of them continue going to school, up to 90% have to leave school.*' While a father noted that a young bride *could* go back to school '*if her husband agrees to let her go*', and a small handful of study participants were able to think of specific girls who had done just that, all agreed that these sojourns were always terminated rather quickly by pregnancy, which is seen as incompatible with schooling. As a teacher noted, '*If they go to class while pregnant, the classmates will make fun of them. They have a very high sense of pride. I don't know about previous years before I moved here, but since I started working here, there has been no student going to class while being pregnant.*'

While a small minority of adults did not see girls' 9th grade education as ultimately advantageous to either them or their future husbands, because for girls '*literacy and illiteracy are the same*', none of our study participants believed that girls' 9th grade education made them less desirable as marriage partners. Indeed, as mentioned above, nearly all study participants, adolescents and adults, believed that 9th grade girls were likely to be better wives and mothers than their less educated peers, primarily because they better understood the value of hygiene and nutrition.

However, this consensus regarding the value of education to women's reproductive roles quickly unravelled when the comparison shifted to 9th-grade girls versus 12th-grade girls. For example, a 19-year-old unmarried girl, who left school after 9th grade, explained that because '*those who go to the 12th grade are lazy, not hardworking*', they are less likely to be chosen as wives. A 16-year-old boy agreed with her; he said, '*The mother with grade 9 education is better than the mother with grade 12 education. The mother with low education works more diligently than the mother with high education. The mother with higher secondary school education works less and often scolds parents in law.*' These sentiments capture a variety of closely held norms, including the tight relationship between the value of women and their work and the expectation of a daughter-in-law's silent subservience.

However, while some study participants, uniformly those who had left school after 9th grade (or their parents), felt that 9th grade was not only a sufficient ending point, but the most desirable one, an equal number of interviewees were clear that a 12th grade education would make girls more desirable on the marriage front. An unmarried 20-year-old, who left school after 9th grade but who has a brother attending upper secondary school said, '*The 12th-grader maybe is more likely to become a good mother, because she knows better how to teach her children.*' A 16-year-old boy, who left school after 8th grade to work for his uncle, agreed. He explained, '*a 12th-grader is more likely to become a good mother, because she's completed the 12th grade, so she knows how to keep clean, to love her children, and knows what it means to feed the children with cooked food and boiled water*'.

'*The 12th-grader often gets married with a working man, as an official or something like that so both husband and wife have wages. The 9th grader gets married with a man who grows corn or something like that or works on the field only.*'

(Man in FGD)

When it came to the marriageability of girls who had completed higher education, our study participants uniformly, without prompting, generated the notion of assortive mating—the idea that people tend to marry those like themselves. All were sure that a highly educated girl *could* get married—but all were equally sure that she would have a significantly restricted pool of partners, as it would include only highly educated boys. One 27-year-old woman with a 9th grade education explained, '*If a girl finishes high school and gets professional training, she won't marry a guy who only finished grade 9 or 7 or 6 and stays home;*

they will differentiate.' Noting that it cuts both ways, she continued, '*According to Hmong people's tradition, men who stay home and do housework don't marry girls… who attend high school. They won't be able to do housework if married.'* An adult in an FGD, noting the difficulty of subsistence farming, offered, '*These highly-educated people must marry those who are as highly-educated as them. I see that here, people who have been to high school or professional training school, in general they don't want to marry common people to work in the fields together, but they must marry someone in the same field as them so that they won't have to work as hard.'* Given that the highest and best use of Hmong women's time and talent continues to be seen as marriage, it may be difficult for Hmong girls to balance competing desires: a higher education and an easier life versus a 9th grade education and an easier mate selection. For now, because boys are more likely than girls to matriculate to upper secondary school, odds are still in girls' favour when it comes to them being able to have both a higher education and a husband. However, given girls' studiousness, the time may come soon that Hmong girls in Ta Lung are more likely than their male peers to continue their educations. What impact that tipping point may have on their marriageability – and younger cohorts' commitment to education – is unknown.

Picture 16: An adolescent boy with a Chinese mobile phone

6.1.4 Engagement with "modernity"

'*It is faster when you have a phone, in the past, you didn't know where she is so you have to wait until the market day to talk.'* (Father)

'*If we don't go to the market and just stay home, how can guys see us and love us?'*
(Women's Union KI)

Within the past five years, even the most remote Hmong communities have seen erosion of their geographic and social isolation. This has both eased their lives and opened new possibilities, contributing to nonlinear shifts in the day-to-day lives of Hmong adolescents, including how they conduct their love lives. While technological progress is not necessarily even related to higher order social progress such as gender equity, to the extent that it alters the social landscape it is important to consider how its influence may play out over time.

6.1.5 Infrastructure

Infrastructure fosters social and economic cohesion. Hmong communities are certainly finding this to be true. While lower secondary schools remain distant from the homes of many children, requiring a walk of up to an hour and half each way, all villages in our study area now have electricity and are benefiting from improved footpaths that make it easier to reach not just the centre of the commune, but other communes as well.

The advent of electrical service –in 2010--has been an unmitigated good for girls and women as it has reduced the time required for daily chores and bought them precious time at night in which to study. As a health worker noted, '*If there's electricity, there's light for girls to study in the evening. For those who are studious and try to study in the evening, it will be more advantageous.*' Indeed, given the time poverty under which girls and women labour, it is likely that electrical service has benefited them substantially more than men and boys and may be one reason their school performance has improved so rapidly.

Picture 17: Meo Vac Sunday market

Roads, however, may be having a mixed impact on girls and women—and, oddly enough, the marriage practices that shape their lives. For example, better ties to markets mean the first-ever opportunities for wage labour among the Hmong, which is increasing income diversification and reducing poverty. As a man in an FGD noted, '*The stone road relieves hardship for people, they can ride motorbikes and transport some goods on it.*' On balance, it is clear that poverty reduction is a good thing for both Hmong girls and the larger Hmong community. Interestingly, however, a few boys, married at 16, smugly hinted that they had chosen to marry early simply because their families could afford for them to do so.

Picture 18: A woman wearing local Hmong clothing

The improved market access that girls themselves are enjoying is also having interesting—and contradictory—impacts. On the one hand, as an adult in a FGD noted, girls are now spending far more time hanging out at the market, which is where '*they start falling in love*'. Indeed, adolescents and young adults overwhelmingly told us that the market is where young people congregate to choose their partners. The market, during Tet, is also *the* venue for forcible bride kidnapping. Both of these factors may be encouraging earlier marriage.

On the other hand, girls' enjoyment of the market may be persuading many of them to delay their marriages, as they know that after marriage their fun will be over. As one girl in an SGD explained, '*If a girl gets married early, she can't hang around much, she can't go to the market because she has to go with her husband*'. Another continued, '*If I live with my parents, I can buy more nice clothes, hang around with friends more, I can travel far away to visit my grandmother.*'

Indeed, what girls *do* at the market – admire and purchase clothing – may also be working to delay marriage. Beautiful Hmong clothing is important to adolescent girls, especially as girls are quite certain that once they marry their days of buying for themselves are over. One unmarried 20 year old, for example, specifically said that an advantage of a late marriage was '*when I get married and have children, I won't have a chance to buy nice clothes anymore*.' Another explained that rather than marrying early, girls should use their adolescent years to accumulate the most, best clothing. She said, '*At the age of 16, I should prepare many clothes so that I could get married at the age of 18. I have already bought wool overcoat and prepared nice clothes. I made embroidered ropes for the skirt*.' As was noted above, many of the out-of-school girls we interviewed were following this path, building bridal trousseaus that are not necessarily practical, but lovely.

6.1.6 Television and film

The impact of television and film on marriage practices and gender norms also appears quite mixed. Most adolescents and young adults said **that they regularly** watched TV, with even those who did not own one watching at their neighbours' homes. On the one hand, TV can open a window into other worlds. One of our OCSs, for example, felt that her understanding of the differences between the Hmong world and the larger world around it had been broadened by watching TV. On the other hand, because the vast majority of TV programming is in Kinh, not Hmong, and very few older Hmong understand Kinh, most families primarily watch films

Picture 19: Music video being watched at home

that they purchase in the market, including both romantic dramas and flashy dance competitions. A KI from the Women's Union explained that this may be fostering unrealistic expectations about relationships and sexuality; '*Now the youngsters have TVs; so I'm sure young people watch movies and often think or want to do like in the movies. But what they do in the movies are just set-up scenes, but some young people think it's real, so they want to do the same. It's not a good thing that young people do things like in the movies.*'

6.1.7 Mobile phones

The introduction of mobile phones has also altered the communication patterns between partners and potential partners. On the one hand, it has made it easier for women to contact their husbands when they are working elsewhere. Several young mothers mentioned that this has resulted in more equitable decision-making regarding, for example, children's health care.

On the other hand, it is clear that mobile technology is also beginning to alter the way in which adolescents communicate with one another. A commune level KI commented, '*Now children use mobile phone to tell their confidences, men and women get together at will, so it is very difficult for parents to control*.' While the majority of adolescents do not yet have their own phones, and even those who do often '*don't like sending text messages to the boys*', most adolescents appear to at least have friends who use phones for flirting. One boy, now 17, said '*nowadays after chatting, if she has a cell phone, I ask for her number and text her*.' Similarly, a girl, now 19, admitted that she texted her boyfriend regularly; she said, '*I text him 2-3 times a day; just talking for fun*.' While a teacher forcefully stated that '*the problem of exchanging love messages or flirting over the phone doesn't exist*', it seems likely that he is engaging in wishful thinking.

6.1.8 The first role models

'*I wish I could get a higher education so that I could do what Mr. Sung is doing in this village, and contribute my part to society.*' (Mr. Sung is the village Party secretary and health worker). (Adolescent girl)

'*If I could get a higher education, later I would applied for a job as a commune official like Ms. Dua.*' (Ms. Dua is the commune WU's vice chairwoman) (Adolescent girl)

Hmong role models, including men who want a different life for their daughters (see Box N), are also encouraging change. A handful of families, for example, have invested in upper secondary education for their daughters. They not only demonstrate that education is attainable, but as their children take on wage labour and are appointed to official positions, they also model a way out of the hardships inherent in subsistence farming. As one 20-year-old noted, for example, '*I saw that my cousins had stable jobs. Basically, they go to work every day, don't know if they have to work hard or not, but they get a salary at the end of every month, and their jobs are not temporary, but are long-term ones; therefore, I thought that I must be able to do the same. And now I'm trying.*'

Similarly, the occasional young woman who has managed to shine not only at both her traditional roles, wife and mother, but also to break new ground, is showing other young women that even if they are out of school they can aspire to more. For example, a 24-year-old woman, who left school after 9th grade, explained that her peers see her as a role model. She said, '*Some women in the neighbourhood asked me. I answered them that women in the context of cultivation land shortage had to find way to raise their children to become educated people and not do it as ancestors did. When I explained, many people understood and said that I was a capable woman.*'

Teachers, even though they are only rarely Hmong, are also powerful role models. Several girls reported, 'I want to become like any of the teachers'. Officials are convinced that if only they can get the first Hmong girls through teaching college, the knock-on impacts on younger cohorts will cascade. One explained, 'Now, no one in the commune works as a teacher. I hope that the children will try to study and become people's teachers who will wholeheartedly serve their roots. That's the only way to touch people's hearts, convince people and children to study and follow good examples.'

Box 16: Men: overlooked agents of change

Sai Thi Mai is a 27-year-old mother of two who is a role model for the commune. A paternal orphan, Mai was raised by her alcoholic uncle after her mother's remarriage. Regularly locked outside at night, and forced to work in the fields for hours each day after she returned from school, she was left with no '*time to review my lessons and do homework before going to class the next morning*.' Although she was aware '*that I didn't have my parents by my side, so I must study so that I would have a job in the future*', she was not allowed to attend upper secondary school.

When she was 18 she married a young man, now a commune official, who had already begun his tertiary education – and her life trajectory took a sharp turn for the better.

Mai and her husband have a remarkably equitable marriage; '*I listen to whatever he says, and he listens to whatever I say*,' she reported. Because he is busy working most of the time, it falls to Mai to make the household decisions. '*If I let him decide, he's often out, he's not home,*' she explained. '*If I wait for him to decide, maybe it won't be done. I just make decisions myself*.'

Mai knows how lucky she is: '*My life, compared to the neighbours, I feel happy*.' She and her husband '*don't fight and argue like other people in the village*.' Furthermore, when her husband has time off work, '*he goes home to play with the two kids*.' Because they share decisions relating to their children, he even bought her a mobile phone '*so that if the kids were sick, I would call him so that he would call home*.'

Asked why her life looks the way it does, Mai replied '*I think it's because my husband has been out in society more*.'

6.2 What slows change?

Marriage practices and their associated gender norms are shifting slowly primarily because of the way in which they are embedded in the broader culture, and are, as Mackie and LeJeune (2009) argue, 'over-determined'—held in place by 'more than one factor, each factor sufficient in itself' (p.21).

6.2.1 Agrarian reality

'I thought that I would get married early to have children early.' (Young father, married at 16)

'Hmong people never have free time during the day, except when it's Tet, we have exactly one day which is the New Year's Day when we don't have to do anything.' (16-year-old girl)

While a continued dependence on subsistence farming is neither necessary nor required in order to maintain Hmong gender roles, as evidenced by diasporic Hmong communities, it certainly plays a part. Farming in Ta Lung depends on very hard manual labour. Mechanization is all but impossible given the terrain, and coaxing enough food from the rocky soil to guarantee sufficient calories can be difficult if weather patterns do not cooperate. This simple reality continues to play a role in Hmong family formation. One mother explained that Hmong tradition called for early childbearing so that by the time old age sets in, at 35, children are large enough to take over the most burdensome labour. She said, '*According to Hmong tradition, we must have children early so that in the future they would grow up and can take care of us earlier. When we are around 35 years old they chop firewood, getting cow grass for their parents, and tending cows and pigs for the parents, so that the parents have time to rest. We will be supporters, while our children will be the main workers.*' Adolescents seem to have heard this message. One married 18-year-old boy, for example, commented, '*My friends told each other that we should get married a bit early, so that in the future, our children would be able to take care of us, so I got married early.*'

The lack of local non-agricultural employment also works to slow shifts in gender norms. Role models above aside, most Hmong parents know their children have little chance of a future that does not involve farming (see also Luong and Nieke, 2013). A 16-year-old girl, forced by her parents to leave school after 9th grade, explained, '*My parents said that a Hmong person, even if she completed the 12th grade, would come back home and work in the fields anyway, so they didn't let me continue going to school.*' Given the limited number of official positions, most of which '*have been filled*' (man in FGD), and the reality that Hmong people '*didn't have connections, so it would be difficult for them to find a job after they graduated*' (20-year-old woman), parents' positions are defensible, particularly given the real costs involved in higher education.

Picture 20: Boys playing with sticks and knives after school

6.2.2 Son preference

*'I think that grade 9 education is enough for a girl, but a boy should finish grade 9 and
then finish grade 12 as well.'* (Mother)

*'For girls, finishing grade 9 or 12 is the same, because after finishing
grade 9 or grade 12, they only get married.'* (Mother)

The impact of son preference on Hmong girls' lives cannot be overstated. Indeed, it is at the heart of the practices and norms that continue to limit their options beginning at birth. Sons play two key roles for their families: they provide old age care for their parents and they are vital to ancestral veneration (see Box O). Daughters, because both their souls and their labour accrue to their marital, rather than natal, families, provide neither.

Because of the crucial roles that sons – and not daughters – fill for their natal families, girls are subject to a wide variety of disadvantages from childhood. For example, in addition to the fact that the largest and poorest families tend to be those who have the most daughters as parents pursue their quest for sons, sons are prioritised for education and are the sole beneficiaries of inheritance. While most families are clear that while they support compulsory 9th grade education for girls that is the absolute limit of where they are willing to go. For example, an adult in an FGD commented, '*I will send the son to school because in the future he will find a job and help the hamlet, if the daughter is sent to school, in the future, she will get married and help another hamlet.*' Indeed, even girls, focussing on their roles as future wives, occasionally see no point in continuing school. One mother explained that she tried to talk her daughter into attending upper secondary school, but the daughter told her, '*A girl after school would go home and get married anyway.*' While son preference continues to play a highly significant role in the larger Vietnamese culture, altering sex ratios and trapping girls and women into traditional private roles even as they move forward publicly, for Hmong girls it appears to be particularly central – largely preventing women from assuming any roles other than those which custom dictates are theirs.

Box 17: Why sons matter

'I want a son, because he will be the breadwinner of the family and will take care of his parents when we get old.' (Father)

'According to Mong people custom you should give birth to a son for your husband's family So that when your husband dies, your son will hold funeral for him.' (Adolescent girl)

'If I have a son, he will live with me, work for me. The daughters will get married and move out when they are old enough, nobody will help me.' (Adolescent girl in SGD)

'Children of the next generation can be born with deformity, affecting the soul of the next generation who worshiping ancestors, so the daughter is not allowed to worship the ancestors.' (Adult FGD)

'Without a son, later on when we grow old, we'll be miserable; there will be no one to look after us.' (Young mother)

'Every family needs to have a son. When his parents die, he will bury them. He will burn joss papers and incense for his parents. When dead, we're ghosts. When we are hungry, we will look for our sons, we cannot look for our daughters.' (Mother)

Indeed, the centrality of women's customary roles is so significant that girls are seen, from their earliest years, as future wives, daughters-in-law and mothers, meaning that even within their natal families it is their capacities for work that are emphasised and valued. Girls, as discussed above, do the lion's share of childhood chores, working longer hours and engaging in a wider variety of tasks. When they finish 9th grade,

their already developed work ethic and skill set makes them particularly valuable to their mothers, who understand, with exceptions, that not only can girls work, but that the more '*playful*' boys cannot. As a mother in an FGD commented about her daughter, who very much wanted to stay in school, '*I have two sons and one daughter only, so I told her to stay at home and help me to do housework.*' Another added, '*When my daughter finished the 9th grade, I stopped sending her to school, because if she had continued, there wouldn't be anyone at home to help me with work, there would be no one to raise the animals and stuff; and there would be no one to help in the fields when the season came.*'

Picture 21: A three generation Hmong family

6.2.3 Filial piety

'*My parents don't allow me, and I don't try to persuade, it is decided by my parents.*' (Adolescent girl)

'*The two sentences are the same. "I don't listen to mother, I don't listen to father", or "Father doesn't teach me, mother doesn't teach me." These two sentences are the same.*' (Father)

For Hmong girls filial piety is tightly interwoven with son-preference. Given that they are destined to become members of their husbands' families, they understand that their biggest contribution to their parents' well-being is their own short-term labour. Driven by this knowledge, girls leave school when they are told to leave school and work when they are told to work. Boys, secure in the knowledge that '*in the future they will inherit everythin*g' (Women's Union KI), appear to be far less malleable to parents' wishes. Though many do leave school in order to come home and work alongside their parents, the fact that their own longer-term interests more closely align with those of their parents' means that they rarely have to choose between their individual and family futures.

While few adolescent girls are able to discuss the conflicts that arise when their own interests do not match those of their parents (hardly surprising given the collective nature of both the Hmong and Vietnamese cultures), it is clear that girls feel this tension acutely in regard to school leaving. Many were initially unable to even admit that the decision had been their parents' – first telling us that they had chosen to leave school and only later admitting that the "choice" had been imposed. Others were clear that they had wanted to stay in school, but had been unable to even ask. A girl in an SGD said, '*I think that finishing the higher secondary*

education may be better for me, but my parents don't allow me.' Only one girl, now 16, reported any significant attempt to change her parents' minds (see Box 18).

Box 18: A good daughter listens to her parents

Thong Thi Mai is a 16-year-old girl who wanted to become a teacher. While she knows that she is luckier than her oldest sister, who was never allowed to go to school at all and was already married by the age of 16, she is still sad, two years after leaving school, that her dreams have been thwarted by being a dutiful daughter.

Mai liked going to school. She liked that '*At school, sometimes there were beans, and meat, sometimes there was fish, so the meals better than at home; at home I only had steamed ground corn and vegetables. At school I had rice to eat.*' She liked that she was learning Vietnamese and more about how the world worked. Because '*People kept saying that Hmong people were unknowledgeable and couldn't speak Kinh language,*' she was committed to studying '*further to become more knowledgeable, to know more things.*' Mai particularly liked that at school the girls were recognised by the teachers as better students. She said, '*The boys skipped classes without any excuses; they skipped classes because they were lazy and didn't like going to school.*'

When she finished 9th grade, however, Mai was told to come home and work with her mother. Unlike her peers, the vast majority of whom were in the same position, she asked to stay – twice. '*The first time I asked, my parents said I was a girl so they wouldn't let me go to school.*' Undaunted, Mai tried to elicit help from a teacher. However, her '*teacher only advised me that if I succeeded in convincing my parents to let me continue my studies, I should go; if not, let it be.*'

She continued, '*After I stayed home for a while, my friends told me to prepare an application to study; I asked my parents one more time, but they didn't allow me.*' At that point even her friends advised her to give up and do as her parents asked. She explained, '*My friends also advised me, saying that my parents gave birth to me, so I should listen to whatever they said; if my parents didn't let me go, I should stop.*' Mai's days are now dedicated to constant labour. She said, '*As for me, each morning I go collecting twigs twice to help my mother, and go to gather cow grass in the afternoon.*'

While she is wistful that '*If I had completed the 12th grade, it would have been different in the way that I would have known more, I would have known how to behave towards the others in a more cultured way,*' she knows that by staying home she has demonstrated to both her parents and her neighbours that she is a model child. Mai explained, '*My listening to my parents proved that I was a good child. I stayed home to help my parents, and did heavy work, and shared my parents' work; such is a good child.*'

6.2.4 Fitting in

'If a girl is not yet a ghost of another family, but is pregnant, people will speak ill of the girl, and speak ill of her parents.' (Adult in FGD)

'The parents will think "Why can't my daughter find a husband?"' (20-year-old woman)

As is evident from the story of Thong Thi Mai (See Box 18 — A good daughter listens to her parents , Hmong girls and women are also acutely aware of the social pressures that encourage conformity with traditional norms and practices. They feel loved when they do as they "should" and they feel ashamed for even thinking as they "shouldn't". They feel proud of working hard enough to attract the attention of their neighbours; they are afraid of being denigrated for being abused or, in the case of marriage by abduction, seen as divorced if they leave their kidnappers. Indeed, in these tiny isolated villages in which everyone

knows everyone else – and behaviours have evolved only in limited ways across decades – the need to fit in shapes the behaviour of all, significantly slowing the rate at which change occurs.

For example, adolescents – particularly girls – are worried that they will be considered "left on the shelf" if they do not marry when young. '*A girl would look so old at the age of 20,*' explained one young woman who married at 17. This may be a reasonable concern, given the comment made by a boy of 14, who disdainfully said, '*The girl with high education… she is too old, so no boy likes her. All other girls of her age got married and have babies.*' While girls are primarily afraid of being too old – and therefor unmarriageable – boys take immense pride in confirming their masculinity by marrying early. They are even prouder of themselves when they attract community attention by capturing, literally or figuratively, girls who are as '*young as a flower*'. Parents also have social status vested in their children's marriage. One young man, for example, said that his parents felt ashamed of his continued status as a single man. He explained that they thought, but did not say, '*It is shameful because other people's sons got married at the age of 15 or 16, why isn't my son married now that he is in his twenties*?'

Above all, however, parents are acutely aware of the risks of their daughters' potential sexual impropriety (see also Vang and Bogenschutz, 2011). Because an out-of-wedlock pregnancy would bring great shame on both a girl and her family, parents feel obliged to keep their daughters as close as possible, but to let hot-headed young lovers marry early even when it goes against their own better judgment. As one mother in an FGD concluded, '*The most important thing is that ... she doesn't have any illegal relationship.*' For many, this sentiment also rules out boarding school, as it opens the possibility of clandestine relationships (see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; UNICEF et al., 2008). A father explained, '*Children aged 17 or 18 are not allowed to sleep there. Their parents don't allow them, they have to sleep at home. They worry if children sleep at the school too much, they don't know if the boys and girls sleep together or not.*' Given that the upper secondary school is located in Meo Vac town, which for most adolescents is a full hour past the commune centre, protecting girls' honour and marriageability effectively precludes their higher education.

Box 19: Which rules to break?

Vang Thi Sung is a 22-year-old woman with a younger sister who is already enrolled in tertiary education. While their parents are illiterate, they are deeply committed to education as a route out of poverty. Sung, who admitted that she has always been a rule breaker with a '*sharp tongue*', even talking back to teachers when she was young, is deeply conflicted about *which* rules to break.

When she was 18, and unmarried, she became pregnant – the result of too much alcohol and a door that was improperly latched. Terrified, not only '*because people would sneer at me for sure*', but at what the scandal would do to her parents, who would have '*to bear the bad reputation of not teaching or supervising their child properly*', she consulted a physician friend and had an abortion. She did not even tell her mother, '*I think my mother is working very hard at home already. Now suddenly if I bring more burden to her, I think it will be very hard for her.*'

On the one hand, Sung's life is back on the only track likely to improve her long-term life chances: she is in school. On the other hand, despite the social acceptability of abortion in the larger Vietnamese culture, she is consumed by guilt at having terminated her pregnancy. She said that she now believes that girls who become pregnant must '*Overcome everything, must leave everything behind, and must not think of anything except how to take the best care of the child first.*' She wishes that she could find a way to communicate to unmarried pregnant girls, '*Courage and self-confidence so that they could overcome those feelings like mine.*'

The case study presented in Box 19 aside, our interviews with girls suggest that parents' concerns about them are largely unfounded. Not only did girls express shock at the notion of premarital relations, founded in part perhaps on the ease with which they could engage in marital relations, but they felt bound enough by the relatively less stringent rules that govern dating. They are worried, for example, that if they show any immediate interest in a boy then they may find their marriage options limited by the court of public opinion,

as their neighbours say, '*This girl is this and that, I won't marry her.*' As one unmarried 20-year-old woman explained, '*If I like him and accept right away, they will criticize me, they will tell their friends "Oh my god, this girl, I've just said a few words but she likes me right away*!"'

6.2.5 Isolation of Hmong girls

'*I don't confide in or talk to them; all I know is to do housework, and to work.*' *(16-year-old girl)*

'*I rarely share. Usually when facing difficulties, I will try to find out how to deal with it myself.*' (unmarried 20-year-old woman)

While there is some evidence that Hmong girls are deliberately delaying their marriages because they understand how hard they will have to work as wives and how little fun they will have, it is also possible that the social isolation that unmarried girls face when they leave school is causing some to jump at the possibility of marriage. Unmarried girls are not '*allowed to travel*' or '*hang out*' and many appear to be very lonely when their '*joyful*' days at school come to an end (girls in SGD). Fed on a diet of romantic dramas, this emotional isolation may lead some to accept early marriage when it is proposed. It also may encourage early fertility, as married women reported that the love of one's children is one of the few up-sides to marriage other than better food security.

Picture 22: Demonstrating embroidery before a meeting

In addition to lacking emotional and social outlets, Hmong girls and young women also lack the emotional and intellectual support they need in order to translate a dream into reality. The Women's Union serves as a source of information for gender-related laws – at least for married women. Schools and the Young Pioneers serve as venues for top-down youth-related messaging. Neither, however, are necessarily places in which girls and young women can explore new thoughts in a participatory manner. As evidenced by many of our OCSs, there are Hmong girls who are willing to be trend-setters. They think new thoughts, question old thoughts and are willing to go out on a limb, even if it risks social humiliation. What most lack, however, is the space in which to exercise and develop their nascent agency. Without that space, most are forced to shelve their dreams and get back to work.

6.2.6 Continued isolation of the Hmong community

'*If we try to study and then have decent jobs and get married with Kinh and*

Tay people, we won't be miserable as today.' (Mother in an FGD)

'Migration is less because it's not allowed.' (Teacher)

The continued geographic and social isolation of the Hmong community also explains much of the stability of discriminatory cultural norms. The Hmong's mountains are steep, and the Government's commitment to infrastructure notwithstanding, transportation remains difficult. An influx of foreign direct investment is unlikely to transform Ha Giang in the way it is transforming the Delta.

This isolation is reinforced by the reality that few Hmong leave their homeland. While some other ethnic groups in Viet Nam migrate regularly in order to earn the cash that is lacking in their home communities, migration from Ta Lung is almost non-existent. This is due to its sheer remoteness, the mismatch of skills between its inhabitants and the needs of the larger economy and, most critically, the centrality of Hmong cultural identity—which has long been focused on ethnic independence and identity survival. While the few Hmong adolescents who have made it to district boarding schools are meeting, often for the first time, non-Hmong students—absolute numbers remain limited and overall external social contact quite rare.

In addition to being socially and geographically isolated, Hmong culture also remains comparatively insulated. With a clear understanding of their social marginalisation, many members of the Hmong community appear to have drawn lines around what is Hmong and what is not-Hmong. In most cases this line delineates what is possible for them and what is not, serving as a rational way to manage their own and their children's expectations. Financially, it is not possible, for example, for them to send their children to university. It is not possible for them to support their children to find good jobs as they lack the requisite social connections. By knowing what it Hmong and what is not Hmong, they refrain from engaging in exercises of futility.

In other cases, our Hmong study participants came across as frankly apologetic for being Hmong. They repeatedly referred to their ethnic group as '*silly*', '*backwards*', '*ignorant*', '*unknowledgeable*', unable to '*learn anything*', '*superstitious*' and '*unable to listen*'. Attempting to communicate the depths of dysfunction they saw in their community, and perhaps manage the opinions that they perceived our research team was likely—as outsiders—to have, they made statements that ranged from '*In this village, there can't be any happy couple*' to '*Parents here don't think about the children's future.'*

While these response types differ in that one emphasises the external and the other in the internal, what they have in common is that both result in the construction of a 'self-image of inferiority….which further disempowers them to attempt social and educational transformations' (Luong and Nieke, 2013: 30). While isolation is a difficult problem to solve, insulation, particularly given the relatively small number of study participants in our sample who were practicing 'selective engagement with modernity', invites dialogue and programming. The Hmong adolescents and parents we interviewed were not, for the most part, clinging fast to the past because they had chosen it, they were clinging fast to the past because it was all they have.

Picture 22: Electric line running beside a village path

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

While it remains the case that Hmong marriage practices continue to place severe restrictions on the lives of girls and women, the larger issue for most is not marriage practices, per se, but the gender norms and ideologies that underpin them. The stickiness of these norms, which prioritize boys and men throughout the life-cycle, favouring them for everything from education to funerary customs, relegates Hmong girls and women to a world in which they are valued almost exclusively for the work they can do and the babies they can bear. Changing these norms will be slow and difficult – particularly given that many are 'over-determined' and held in place by factors ranging from farming techniques to the weight of thousands of years of history.

The unique positioning of Hmong girls, vis-à-vis the one-party state, the broader Vietnamese culture and Hmong reality, is in many ways encouraging unpredictable, non-linear change (see Figure 6). Evidence of this can be seen in the lives of almost all the adolescents and young adults we interviewed, as they concurrently hold both modern and traditional beliefs and seem untroubled by their contradictory natures. It can also be seen in the way in which some changes, like improved access to education, which *ought* to be encouraging more modern gender roles and equitable marriage practices, may instead be reinforcing traditional patterns by facilitating adolescents to marry as soon as they leave lower secondary school.

Figure 6: Unique positioning of Hmong girls and why gendered social norms remain 'sticky'

◄ **Norm stability**   **Norm change** ►

A one-party state:

Vietnam's government controls not only the law, but social messaging. This monolithic influence generally works for Hmong girls in terms of their gender-- as child marriage and bride kidnapping are illegal, contraception is free and top-down policy has the potential to alter behaviour, if not attitudes, very rapidly. On the other hand, state policies regarding ethnic minorities can work against Hmong girls – as, amongst other things, mother-tongue education is rare and it is difficult for Hmong people to secure official positions. State policies have also deliberately emphasised the centrality of women's domestic roles.

◄ **Norm stability**   **Norm change** ►

Vietnamese culture:

On the one hand, the wider national culture, which has seen recent rapid advances in girls' education and women's economic and political participation, may provide Hmong girls with role models. On the other hand, broader patriarchal norms which emphasise family, over individual, interests and reinforce tradition with strict filial piety, tend to slow change, particularly within the confines of the home.

◄ **Norm stability**

Hmong reality:

Economics and culture combine to ensure that Hmong reality works on all fronts to limit the capabilities of girls. Both isolated and insular, with a preference for sons and a belief that daughters' souls belong to their marital families, the culture emphasises interdependence and collectiveness in a way that makes its norms particularly sticky. Hmong reality also continues to be shaped by the fact that non-agricultural options are nearly non-existent and poverty rates are exceedingly high.

Hmong girls:

Despite disadvantages ranging from limited choice over marriage partners, to excessive workloads to domestic violence, some Hmong girls and women are beginning to imagine new futures, at least in some regards. Struggling to exercise their nascent agency and provide role models for their peers, Hmong girls need spaces and time in which to help themselves help each other learn to stand their ground about the changes they believe they need.

With limited space to develop – much less practice – agency, some Hmong girls are beginning to imagine a future where they are safe from bride kidnapping, free to attend upper secondary school and safe from domestic violence.

Given the complexity of the Hmong girl's reality, it is vital that policy and programming are tailored with care to reflect the strengths and weaknesses or their unique situation. A combination of tactics, building on international best practices, legal machinery and girls' agency will be needed.

Bride kidnapping, for example, as a tradition rooted in concerns about girls' marriageability, may be amenable to programming that encourages community abandonment, such as that directed at ending FGM in sub-Saharan Africa (Mackie and LeJeune, 2009). Particularly given that the tradition is already both comparatively rare and understood by community members to be generally contrary to the interests of girls and their families – except in regard to their future marriageability – building consensus regarding girls' ability leave an unchosen marriage, and take their ghosts with them, ought to be a quick win due to the relatively unique role of Viet Nam's mass organisations.

Regional experiences with altering the relative "worth" of sons versus daughters, many of which highlight the uneven, "messy" ways in which norms shift, may also prove useful to encouraging Hmong families (and their Kinh counterparts) to see the value in investing in their daughters. While son preference remains entrenched in much of Asia, South Korea's sex ratio at birth, once the world's highest, has returned to biologic norms (Chung and Das Gupta, 2007), China's has now declined for four consecutive years (China Daily, 2013) and there is evidence that in India rates may be moderating on a national level and actually improving in some sub-national areas (Bhalla et al., 2013; Das Gupta et al., 2009). Similarly, in Bangladesh, 'a culture of strong son preference appears to be giving way to a growing indifference to the sex of a child' (Huq et al., 2012: 8; Kabeer et al., forthcoming).

Box 20: Regional experiences with the moderation of son preference

Regional experience with the evolution of son preference is varied. In South Korea, for example, son preference has moderated primarily as the result of industrialisation and urbanisation, both of which made 'people more independent of familial pressures and traditions' (Chung and Das Gupta, 2007: 14), and occurred *despite* the fact that son preference itself was 'buttressed by public policies upholding the patriarchal family system' (ibid.:i). China's experience offers a different lesson. While, like Viet Nam, it has strongly worded policies favouring gender equality, they have been poorly enforced (Livesey, 2012). Furthermore, in the case of China, socioeconomic development itself has had mixed impacts on son preference – actually strengthening it in some cases, primarily as it reinforced 'the patriarchal character of the Chinese urban family' making it the 'main unit to provide and secure social and economic welfare' (Eklund, 2011:60. As Das Gupta (2009) predicted, now that the Chinese government has unrolled a plethora of policies, such as an old age pension that reduces the financial necessity of sons, the 'underpinnings of the rigid patrilineal rules' that hold up son preference are beginning to shift (p.3).

Key to effecting change is a willingness to tailor messaging 'rather than try an approach of one size fits all' (Pande and Astone, 2007: 1). For example, a critical difference between India and Viet Nam, which may have significant effects on how the value of girls is demonstrated to parents and communities, is the difference between dowry and bride-price. Although son preference is driven by economics and religious tradition in both cultures, in India, daughters 'require' an illegal dowry, thus rendering them economic losses to the family, while sons constitute an economic gain (Hammad and Rajoria, 2013; Diamond-Smith et al., 2008). Hmong girls are spared this burden, but given the prevalence of bride price, it is crucial to ascertain what function it is serving in Viet Nam's Hmong community. The implications for girls and women vary widely depending on the interpretation of the meaning of the practice: Lemoine 's (2012a), who believes that it commodifies women, or Talee Vang's (2013), who believes that it 'represents a promise to love and respect a woman' (also see Cooper, 1988).

Also key to effecting change is to acknowledge that because son preference 'is rooted in both cultural and material structures' it 'must be addressed simultaneously on a number of different fronts' (Huq et al., 2012: 44). Girls' education – particularly at the post-secondary level – has been shown to be critical in a variety of countries (ibid.; Pande and Astone, 2007). The promotion of matrilocal residence patterns also appears to

improve the value that families place on their daughters (Jin et al., 2007). In Bangladesh, where NGO penetration is particularly high, there is speculation that NGOs have served as 'conduits for new norms and values which go right down to the grassroots,' with measurable impacts on women's access to credit, employment and empowerment (Huq et al., 2012: 39).

Because the Hmong diaspora is now several decades removed from the agrarian realities that continue to so strongly shape the gender norms that structure the lives of Ta Lung's Hmong girls, diasporic voices are an important way to understand the stickiness of Hmong culture. In the US, the Hmong community is producing significant numbers of both blogs and PhDs – both of which, because they simultaneously offer an 'insider' perspective, i.e. being Hmong, and an outsider perspective, i.e. being Western and urban, may prove useful to shaping policy and programming directed at Hmong girls in rural Viet Nam.

For example, while local officials are convinced that the key to reaching an educational tipping point is to facilitate the upper-secondary educations of today's Hmong adolescent girls, the Hmong-American experience suggests that even if that tipping point is reached, it may not necessarily be associated with changes in the larger gender ideologies and kinship roles that determine girls' perceived worth (MB, 2013; Khang, 2010; Lo, 2009; Xiong, 2008; Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2009). Indeed, Long (2008), who explores the contemporary experiences of Vietnamese, Hmong, Vietnamese-American and Hmong-American women, argues that 'because cultural identity is the defining feature of Hmongness…and because kinship ties define culture and priorities…for women (and men) to resist Hmong kinship roles and the "oppressions" they entail is for this migratory Hmong culture to disappear' (20). While it is possible that the Hmong-American community is diverging from the Hmong-Vietnamese community and is reifying cultural patterns in the same way that Chinese-Americans held on to foot binding far longer than did their Chinese peers (Mackie and Le Jeune, 2009), the rigidity of those patterns, which Long describes as 'freighted with extraordinary importance', suggests that Hmong cultural malleability is low and that change will not happen overnight (20). It also suggests that more deliberate messaging and programming regarding the value of girls, perhaps modelled on the experiences of China and India, which are using 'vigorous media campaigns and legislation, and more recently financial incentives to parents with daughters', may be in order (Das Gupta et al., 2009:2).

Hmong girls and women are particularly trapped by their private gender roles. However, Viet Nam's own experience with growing women's public roles may provide a scaffold on which to help the Government grow new private roles for women. The flurry of gender policies and machineries which enabled women to enter the workforce and the political arena, making Viet Nam a regional leader, have been replicated—on paper—with a similar set of laws calling for marriage equality and equitable distribution of domestic work. However, because those laws are poorly implemented and indeed exist side-by-side with laws that reify women's position vis-à-vis raising 'happy Vietnamese families', the net effect on women's private roles has been closer to that of the Korean Family Law, which codified traditional patriarchal norms into law (Chung and Das Gupta, 2007), than the more equitable society envisioned by the Vietnamese Constitution.

It is also critical that the Government of Viet Nam reimagine its relationship with the Hmong, who have, in Long's (2008) words, 'a vexed relationship to Vietnamese national identity and ideology' (20). Given that national progress towards indicators ranging from poverty to child mortality is now increasingly dependent on the progress of pockets of persistent disadvantage—like those seen in the Hmong community—the Government needs to work with Hmong leaders to find paths that simultaneously meet the needs of both. Thousands of years of history and a diaspora that now spans four continents give evidence to the tenacity of Hmong culture. If, rather than inadvertently encouraging either 'selective engagement with modernity' (Turner and Michaud, 2009: 54-55) or a 'self-image of inferiority' (Luong and Nieke, 2013: 30), the Government was able to work with the Hmong to harness the strengths of both for the next generation, real progress is possible.

7.2 Policy and programming recommendations

Based on our study participants' stories, our research suggests that the following policy and programming priorities need to be considered if adolescent girls' capabilities are to be realised:

Ensure continued and expanded support to attend school. There has been a remarkably fast and thorough educational transition in Ta Lung to seeing the completion of 9th grade as the new 'normal'. That said, this transition is at grave risk, according to key informants, with the Government's new educational policy, which has taken fee waivers away from Hmong children who are not officially 'poor'. Given that the poverty line in Viet Nam is extremely low by international standards , and that the line that separates poor and non-poor households is all but invisible in northern Ha Giang province, commune leaders are concerned that their hard-won efforts to get all children into school will soon be unravelled. Allowing this this to happen would be short-sighted, given that educating today's adolescent girls has the potential to snowball throughout the Hmong community – particularly if paired with a policy to hire them back to teach the next generation of Hmong students. Girls, unlike boys, very often expressed a strong desire to attend secondary school and listed the financial and opportunity costs to their parents as key barriers.

Incentivise and monitor better enforcement of national laws on the age of marriage. Because Hmong marriages are often contracted by the simple expediency of moving in with one another – fines for under-aged marriage are rarely issued and young couples can easily avoid detection by simply not applying for a marriage certificate until they reach legal age. Given, however, that young couples universally live with the husband's parents--and the sensitivity of Hmong parents to educational fines, it seems likely that marriage fines may help reduce the number of early marriages if they are universally enforced and large enough to be meaningful.

Invest in employment opportunities that could capitalise on Hmong uniqueness and skills. It is difficult to step outside a culture based so robustly on agrarian realities. That said, given the geographic isolation of the Hmong homeland, and the already growing tourism industry, it may be wise for the Government to invest more heavily in the infrastructure and advertising that could bring more opportunities – and cash – to Hmong communities. This could include environmental and cultural tourism initiatives—although care must be taken to prevent exploitation of the Hmong "love markets", which tend to be romanticised by the press and which could therefore encourage "sexploitation". It will be critical to ensure, via prioritising training and loans, that these opportunities accrue to Hmong entrepreneurs, rather than local Kinh households—and that they include women. For example, given the rising interest in trekking vacations, women could be provided with support to open hostels and eateries that cater to tourists. Based on Duong's research, girls could be trained as guides.

Consider affirmative action measures. Given that Hmong families believe that they lack the financial and social resources with which to translate their own educational investments into longer-term economic success via positions with the state sector, the Government should invest heavily in ensuring the emergence of Hmong 'trend setters' who can establish clear links in the minds of other Hmong families between education and economic success—thereby forging a path for next generation. This will require supporting Hmong political candidates not only in villages, but also in district and provincial governments, and strengthening the position and mandate of the national level Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. The Government might look for example to India's experience with quotas for marginalised caste groups.

Encourage progressive role models for adolescents. Role models - beyond the movie stars they watch on TV – could play a key role in shaping more progressive gender norms. Key informants noted that the more remote hamlets have never sent a girl to secondary school or proposed a candidate, male or female, for commune office. While girls noted that their non-Hmong teachers are inspirational, most adolescents are unable to conceive that – as Hmong – their own lives could differ significantly from those of their parents. Initiatives could include educational programming, visits to university campuses in urban centres and girls clubs where role models could be invited to talk. NGOs may consider, for example, building programming similar to Canada's National Aboriginal Role Model Program[24], which Gender-based violence   .

Discourage early marriage and prevent pre-marital pregnancies by investing in sexual and reproductive health education and contraception for unmarried young people. Girls and boys have far more opportunities to interact with one another than their parents did at the same age; they do not, however, have access to any more sexual or reproductive health (SRH) information or contraception, as pre-marital sexual activity is strictly taboo and even adolescents believe that it would be inappropriate for them to

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24 http://www.naho.ca/rolemodel/about/

understand the nature of marital relations. Given that the only solution, so far, is for parents to allow their children to marry at too young an age, it seems advisable to make information and contraception more easily accessible, along with written materials in the Hmong language that adolescents can read in private.

Promote educational programming in schools and communities to eliminate marriage by abduction. Given that marriage by abduction still exists in rural areas, with the youngest girls the most likely to become victims, boys need to hear that 'kidnapping' is never an acceptable way to find a wife. We recommend, given the target audience, that messages emphasise that happier wives – older girls who can make their own choices – ultimately mean happier husbands. In addition, boys' parents need incentives to be steered away from condoning kidnappings, most successful would likely be fines imposed by hamlet or commune authorities. Girls (through schools, given their ages and the already existent educational infrastructure) and their parents (through mass organisations such as the Women's Union or Fatherland Front) need to be taught that they need not be voiceless victims and that an unwanted marriage is always an illegal marriage that should have no impact on their future marriageability.

Address gender-based violence by supporting victims and encouraging new masculinities. Given the pervasiveness of drunken violence and the shame felt by women who are caught in its web, it is vital that the Women's Union and other mass organisations address more directly what girls and young women can do to keep themselves safe. It is also vital that men and boys learn about new forms and practices of masculinity, through awareness raising and education initiatives led by professionals who have experience in working sensitively with boys and men. Given the concerns of the Women's Union KIs, who correctly noted that cash fines negatively impact both the perpetrators and the victims of GBV, we suggest modelling punishments on the successful public labour fines which are handed out to the fathers of truants.

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Appendix

1. Research instruments

1.1 Community conceptual mapping and timeline

INSTRUCTIONS

Respondents:
Per research site, undertake one discussion with each of the following:
- Younger people (18 - 30), male and female mixed, involving youth leaders, NGOs workers, ok if they are from outside the community as they might have an interesting perspective (e.g. young teachers or government employees).
- Middle-aged people (30-50), male and female mixed, involving community leaders and respected persons who feel free to talk
- Older men (60+) (male only - for grandfathers' perspectives; could be the village elder or others).

Procedures:
Plan to take at least 2 hours. Start with the conceptual mapping (general discussion first), then proceed to the community timeline. You can start with the marriage theme, then education in one group; and reverse the order with the other group in case things get more rushed towards the end.

Materials needed: Flip chart and markers, tape and pins; drawing board

Thematic focus
- What sorts of norms and practices are there in this community around early marriage and other marriage practices? Around girls' schooling?
- Are there differences between girls and boys?
- Have these norms and practices shifted over time? If so how and why?
- What sorts of interventions if any exist or have existed to change these norms?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT

- Date_____Location_____
- Numbers of participants (at beginning):_____ (at end):_____
- Kind of participants (older men/women; younger men/women):_____
- Ages (average):_____
- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

- **How was the process?** Was it participatory; did everyone take part in the discussion; did anyone dominate? Did anyone walk out, why: was it difficult / easy to manage, why; were people comfortable / uncomfortable, why? etc.

QUESTION GUIDE

Timeline of changes

Draw a timeline on a large sheet of paper or the ground to map changes in marriage practices and girls education at community level against the backdrop of major events in the country and district/locality.

- Political/governmental/administrative changes (national and local levels)
- Introduction of particular policies, laws, programmes, services
- Economic changes, conditions
- Environmental events (droughts/floods, harvest failures)
- Introduction of new technologies (ICTs, for example mobile phones, others)
- Conflict, war, displacement

Discussion of 1) whether the types of changes being mapped affect other communities in the district or are unique to this community; and 2) how these changes intersect with marriage and education - as you go along with the other questions

Community timeline framework

Conflict					
Technological					
Environmental					
Economic					
Laws/policies/ programmes services					
Local political					
National political					
Changes in:	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Marriage					
Girls' education					

Marriage

We would like to talk about marriage in this community.

Forms/types and practices
What do you understand by marriage in this community?
- Can you please describe the most common forms of marriage and marriage processes/ practices here?
  - Forms: Religious/civil/customary/cohabitation
  - Types: Monogamy/polygamy
  - Practices: Preparation; bride wealth; arranged/by choice; marital residence patterns

- Are these forms/types of marriages/ practices common throughout this district? Or do they vary by group? Explain.
- Are there any advantages or disadvantages of one form / practice over another? (for men/women?)
- Have these practices changed over time? Since when? Why/why not/ causes? What are your views/feelings on these changes/lack of change?

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Evolving marriage practices

*Before and after exercise***:** Ask group participants to provide 2 statements following the patterns below to describe reality in their communities.
- **We used to think X about marriage but now we think Y**
- **We used to do X but now we do Y about marriage**

[give hypothetical examples that illustrate both change or stasis or partial change – to avoid leading them in a particular direction]

</div>

In-depth discussion of age at marriage:

To explore changes or lack thereof around early marriage norms and practices in their community and their views on these changes /non-changes – positive/ negative and why
- What is the usual age for marriage in this community (for girls/boys)? Has this been changing? How/why?
- What do most people think is the appropriate age for girls to marry in this community and why? Is it different for boys and why?
- Do you know what the legal age for marriage is (for girls/boys). What do you think about this?
- Do some girls marry later or not at all? Who/ which girls? [individuals or groups] Why? And how do people here think about this?
- Have these attitudes evolved over time and if so how and why? Are you able to link any of these changes to events in your timeline?
- Are there some ideas/ customs/ attitudes that promote or discourage girls' marriage at early or late age [separate when you ask people so as not to get muddled!]? Have these ideas/attitudes etc. changed over time? Why? In what ways?
- Are there specific people/groups who actively work to maintain girls marrying at age X? [fill in early expected age of marriage] Who are these people? Why does their opinion carry weight? / Why are they influential?
- Are there specific groups working to move the desirable age of marriage for girls? Who are they? [If national level actors] How are their views communicated/ conveyed at local level? Does their opinion carry weight here? Why?
- What are some of the positive or negative consequences for a girl who marries very early or very late

Incentives: *For each probe as follows: Are the gains economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?*
- What are the incentives for parents to marry their girls at an early or later age?
- Why are the incentives for girls to marry at an early or later age?

Sanctions: *For, probe as follows: Are the consequences economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?*
- If a girl's parents wants her to get married early and she refuses, what happens?
- If a family is not willing to marry their daughter off early, what happens?
- If the expected age of marriage here differs from the legal age, how do people decide what to do? What motivates this decision-making process? What happens?
- If a girl gets married or cohabits early without informing her family what happens?

Special questions on children outside of marriage (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- Is it common for girls in this community to have children before they are married? Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?

- What effect (positive/negative) does having a child have on an unmarried girl's life? (Physical, social, economic, schooling, marriage prospects, others)
- How is having a baby when not married viewed by others? (Parents, peers, relatives, authorities, future marriage partners....) and how does the unmarried girl view herself?
- What differences are there in having a baby when married or unmarried?
- Does having a baby when not married create any particular problems/challenges for the girl?
- How are boys who have fathered children when not married viewed by the community? How do they view themselves?
- Do boys who have fathered children when not married usually take some responsibility for them? If so, what? If not, why not?

Laws, programmes, policies and services
- What are some of the existing laws, programmes or policies around marriage – particularly early marriage?
- What do you think could/should be done to strengthen laws, programmes or policies around marriage – particularly early marriage?
- What are some of the existing laws, programmes or policies around adolescent pregnancy?
- What do you think could/should be done to strengthen laws, programmes or policies around adolescent pregnancy?
- What are some of the services that exist for young married couples? How could these be strengthened?

Education

We would like to talk about education services in this community and differences between education for girls and boys.

Services
Can you please describe what exists here. [this is supposed to be a quick answer]
   o Primary; Secondary; tertiary; alternative; skills training; religious ; informal education
- Since when have these services been available? [remember to add to timeline exercise later].
- What do you think about these services?
   o Accessibility; Quality; Value

Comparative value of education for girls and boys

> **The following for quick and animated discussion**:
> "Education is important for boys" Why or why not?
> "Education is important for girls" Why or why not?
> Is education more important for boys than for girls? Why or why not?

- Until what age or grade do you think it is appropriate for girls to get an education and why?
- Is it different for boys and why?
- Do some girls not go to school? What influences this? Are there any particular groups of girls who are less likely to go to school and why? Is it different for boys? Why?
- Are there some ideas/ customs/ attitudes that promote or discourage girls' education? Do these change with the age of the girl? Have these ideas/attitudes etc. changed over time? Why? In what ways?
- Are there specific people/groups who actively work to resist girls school attendance beyond primary level? Who are these people? Why does their opinion carry weight? / Why are they influential?
- Are there specific groups working to promote girls' education beyond primary level? Who are they? [If national level actors] How are their views communicated/ conveyed at local level? Does their opinion carry weight here? Why?
- Have attitudes and practices around girls' education changed over time? How? Why? In some places more than others? What do you think about these changes?

Incentives: (For each of the scenarios below probe: Are the gains economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?)

- Why would parents want their girls to leave school after their primary education? [The emphasis here is on what they hope to gain…]
- Why would girls want to leave school after their primary education?
- Why would parents want their girls to continue in school?
- Why would a girl want to continue in school?

Sanctions: (For each of the scenarios below probe: Are the consequences economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?)
- If a family wants their daughter to continue in school beyond what most girls do, what happens?
- If the expected level of education for girls here differs from the legal level of compulsory education, how do people decide what to do? What motivates this decision-making process? What happens?
- If a girl tries to stay in school beyond what her parents want, what happens?
- If the parents want the girl to continue her schooling, and she refused what happens?

Intersection of early marriage/pregnancy and girls' education norms (*to be integrated above*)
- How does marriage affect a girls' education trajectory? (Does it prevent girls from staying in school?)
- How do people feel about this? (*parents; parents-in-law; community members; teachers; local authorities; religious authorities; husbands*)
- Are these feelings/attitudes and practices/consequences different for particular groups of girls (*probe for social class, ethnicity, religion etc.)?*
- Does this change if the married girl has a child? If so how and why?
- What about having a child outside of marriage - how does this affect a girls' education trajectory?
- How do people feel about this? (*parents; parents-in-law; community members; teachers; local authorities; religious authorities; husbands*)
- How does later education [education beyond primary education/ expected norm] for girls affect marriage practices and prospects? (*girls' individual outcomes; family outcomes*)
- What are some of the laws/policies and programmes to support girls' education?
- What do you think could be done to strengthen laws/policies and programmes to support girls' education?

1.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) adolescent girls and boys

INSTRUCTIONS

Respondents
- Total of five groups (approx. 5-6 participants per group):
- Girls and boys – 14/15-19 years. In and out of school; married and non-married;
1. Unmarried girls– in-school
2. Unmarried girls – out-of-school
3. Married girls– out-of-school
4. Unmarried boys - in-school
5. Unmarried adolescent mothers – out of school (special questions)

Materials needed: Flip chart and markers; tape; pins; drawing box

Thematic focus:
- Ideals of being a woman/man; wife/husband
- Social norms and practices around marriage and education
- Changes in the above

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT

- Date_____Location_____:
- Numbers of participants (at beginning):_____ (at end):_____

- Kind of participants (girls/boys; married/unmarried; in/out of school. adolescent mothers
  _____

- Ages (average):_____
- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____
- **How was the process?** Was it participatory; did everyone take part in the discussion; did anyone dominate? Did anyone walk out, why: was it difficult / easy to manage, why; were people comfortable / uncomfortable, why? etc.

QUESTION GUIDE

Ideals of masculinity and femininity

Warm-up exercise
Start with drawings of girl / women and boy/ men – then use post-its to brainstorm on characteristics of ideal boy/girl/ man/woman
- What are girls expected to do and how are they expected to behave? What about boys?
- What types of things are girls told that they shouldn't do? [e.g. girls are not supposed to do….] What about boys?
- What are the key roles and responsibilities of boys/girls; men/women in the family?

Views on girls
- Do you think many girls are able to meet those expectations? [referring back to the drawings]
- Are they difficult to achieve?
- Do girls feel under pressure to live up to those expectations? If yes, where do you think the pressure comes from? What do you gain by living up to this ideal and what happens if you don't?
- Do some people/individuals have different expectations for girls and women?
  Peers; adults; religion/ethnicity; socio-economic status; occupational status

Views on boys
- Do you think many boys are able to meet the expectations? [referring back to the drawings]
- Are they difficult to achieve?
- Do boys feel under pressure to live up to those expectations? If yes, where do you think the pressure comes from? What do boys gain by living up to this ideal and what happens if they don't?
- Do some people/individuals have different expectations for boys and men?
  Peers; adults; religion/ethnicity; socio-economic status; occupational status

Views on Marriage and fertility

Age
- What do you think is a good age for girls to be married? Why? How about for boys? Why? Do adults feel the same?
- What is the usual age in this community?
  o Has it changed? Since when and what drove that change?
- Do you know what the legal age for marriage is (for girls/boys)? What do you think about this?
- What are some of the advantages (practical/economic/social) for girls to marry early? Marry later? [what do you mean by later if not already mentioned – use the specific age that they have already given…] Not marry at all?
  o For parents; for girls; other family members [e.g. brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins]
- What are some of the disadvantages (practical/economic and social) of marrying at an early age? Marrying later? Remaining single?
  o For parents; for girls; other family members [e.g. brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins

Rationale for marriage (Probe: Have there been any changes in the above over time?)
- Do most girls want to get married in this locality? If so why/why not?
- What are your expectations from marriage – positive and negative? [including probes around children, protection/family honour, economic security, emotional wellbeing etc.]
- What if a girl in this locality doesn't get married? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What are her alternative options?
- Do most boys want to get married in this locality? If so why/why not?
- What are their expectations from marriage – positive and negative? [including probes around kids, family honour, economic security, emotional wellbeing, fear of GBV, concerns about care work burden etc.]
- What if a boy in this locality doesn't get married? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What are his alternative options?

Choice of marriage partner (Probe: Have there been any changes in the above over time?)
- Do girls get to choose their husbands? Why/why not? Who makes the choice and enforces it? Are there particular groups of girls who have greater agency/flexibility in the process? Has this been changing over time?
- What are your feelings about arranged marriages? What happens if girls don't follow arranged marriages?
- Do boys chose their wives here? And has this custom been changing over time – if so how? Why?
-

Marriage arrangements (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- What are the differences between different forms of marriage (religious, civil, customary, cohabitation)? Which type is most practiced here and what do you think about it?
- Is bride price given at marriage in this community? Why/Why not? By all groups or some? What does it consist of? How do you feel about it? What if it is not given?
- Are there any special preparations for girls and boys before marriage (Physical/ informational? Other?) Who conducts this preparation? When does it occur?
- Where does the married couple live after marriage? (With the boys' parents? With the girls' parents? With other relatives? Alone?)
- What happens if there are problems in the couple? Who can you turn to? How do they help you?
- Do you think there could be any programmes that could help you in married life?

Fertility/children (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- What is the usual size of the family here? How many children would you want?
- What about the gender of the child? Does it make any difference to you, your husband, your parents/ parents-in-law?
- What if you can't have a child?
- What if you have a child when you are not married?
- How are these views/expectations different between you and your parents/ grandparents? Now/long ago?

Access to services (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- What do girls do when they get pregnant? Who do they turn to? Where do they go?
- What are some of the problems and/or challenges adolescent girls face when pregnant, giving birth, and after giving birth (*Probe: health, social, material.....*)
- Do adolescent girls have access to reproductive health services in this community? (contraception; safe deliveries)?
- What are some of the obstacles to using these services? (e.g. awareness, language, attitudes of service providers, perceptions of quality/confidentiality, distance, costs)
- Do you have to be married to have access to these services?
- Is there sufficient information about SRH accessible to girls in this community? What do you think could be done to improve this situation?
- In the case of domestic/ GBV who can girls turn to for help? Are there specific services? What about legal aid?
- If a girl is divorced/abandoned/ widowed, how is she supported (e.g. do families take them back in)? Is there legal protection? If there is, do the courts treat girls equitably?
- What do you think could be done to strengthen services for girls who are having trouble in their marriages?

Views on education

- Have you all been in school at some point? (for those out of school) What grade are you in school (for those in school)
- Do most children go to school here and until what age? Are there any differences between boys and girls? Has this been changing?
- What are the expectations for sons vs daughters – if there are differences why? Has this been changing over time?
- Who should ensure that all children go to school and to what age? Is it different for boys and girls?
- Are the experiences of boys and girls similar or different in school? If different, why?
  - Treatment by teachers (favouritism, discipline, abuse); peer groups); teaching/learning experience; school environment –safety/sanitation; leadership/participation in schools; extra-curricular activities; sports; discipline/subjects ; performance; retention/dropouts
- What has your school experience been like? Are you learning important and useful things? Do you think it is preparing you well for your future? What could be done to improve this?
- What about your future plans about school? Beyond school? What thinking informs these plans? Are there barriers for you to achieve those plans?
- If you have children, what would be the ideal school trajectory for your children?

Intersections between marriage/pregnancy and education for girls *(integrated into the above)*

- Should an 18 yr old girl be in school or married? What are advantages/ disadvantages? What is most common here, and are things changing over time?
- Is it common for girls to withdraw from school for marriage? At what age? What do you think about this? Has it been changing?
- What do you think about married girls and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- What about unmarried girls with children and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- What do you think might be done to support married girls/ or unmarried mothers to continue with schooling?
- Do you think more educated girls have more problems finding husbands than less educated girls. If so why/why not? Is this changing?

- Does education have any influence in the marriage payments? For the girl? For the boy? Has this been changing at all over time?
- Do you think being more educated makes you a better wife, mother, daughter-in-law? Or do you think this may create problems? [for example….] Is this changing over time?
- Do you think education makes boys/men better husbands/son-in-laws/brothers/fathers? Is this changing over time?

1.3 IDIs with unmarried boys (15-19 yrs) who have adolescent sisters

INSTRUCTIONS
Respondents: A mix of in and out of school boys
Materials needed: Flip chart, markers; tape; pins; drawing board
Thematic focus:
- Boys' views of ideals of being a woman/man; wife/husband
- Social norms and practices around marriage and education
- Changes in the above

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT
- Date_____Location_____:
- Time start: _____   Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Individual information as follows:

• *Name*	
• *Age*	
• *Place of birth*	
• *Place of residence*	
• *Education status/level – own*	
• *Education status/level – siblings*	
• *Education status/level – parents*	
• *Work or occupation*	
• *Parents' occupations*	
• *Parent's marital status (includes polygamy) of parents (and number of children)*	
• *Household living arrangements (who lives in his household; who is considered the head of household?)*	
• *Ethnicity/ language*	
• *Religion*	

QUESTION GUIDE

Ideals of masculinity and femininity

Warm up:
We'd like to start by drawing the members of your family and then talking about their main roles and responsibilities within the household. (Have them draw members of their family)
- Similarities and differences with siblings
- Roles of parents
- Have these always been so or are they changing? If changing, why?

Now we'd like to sketch your community and ask you to identify places where boys and girls go – either jointly or separately. (Have them sketch their community)

- What do you do in these different spaces?
- If there are differences between girls and boys, why?
- Have these always been so or are they changing? If changing, why?

Ideals of masculinity (Probe: Are these ideals changing over time)?
- What are the characteristics of an ideal boy in your community? Of an ideal man? Are there any common sayings or proverbs that people use around here?
  - Do you think many boys obtain this ideal?
  - What do you think about this in your own case? Is it important to you? If it is, is it difficult to achieve?
  - Do you feel under pressure to live up to that ideal? If yes, where do you think the pressure comes from? What do you gain by living up to this ideal and what happens if you don't?
  - Do some people/individuals have different ideals?
    - Peers; older brothers; adults; religious leaders; others

Ideals of femininity (Probe: Are these ideals changing over time?)
- What are the characteristics of an ideal girl in your community? Of an ideal woman? Are there any sayings or proverbs that are used around here?
  - Do you think many girls obtain this ideal?
  - Are these ideals important to you? Why/Why not?)
  - Do you think it is difficult for girls to achieve these ideals? In what way?
  - Do you think your sister feels under pressure to live up to these ideals? If yes, where do you think the pressure comes from? What do girls gain by living up to this ideal and what happens if they don't?
  - Do some people/individuals have different ideals?
    - Peers; adults; religious leaders; others

Views on marriage / children outside of marriage

- Why would you want to get married? What do you hope to get out of it?
- What would you look for in a girl you would like to marry? What sort of girl would you want to avoid?
- When you are married, what do you think will make you a good husband? Do you envisage any obstacles in becoming a good husband? [probe on the below:]
  - Employment prospects; housing arrangements; assets; land; affordability of marriage; meeting parents' expectations for a marriage partner
- What sort of boys do you think girls seek to avoid?
- What do you think your father's view is in terms of ideal wife/ ideal husband? If different, what accounts for this difference?
- What do you think is the best /most appropriate age for a girl to marry? For a boy to marry? Why? What is the expected age in this community? Has this changed over time?
- Do you know what the legal age for marriage is in Viet Nam? (for girls/boys)
- Who decides on the appropriate age for marriage? How is it enforced? What happens if it is not followed? Has this changed over time?
- Who if anyone provides you with information or guidance on marriage and sexuality? What sorts of things do you get information/guidance on? Is it helpful? What are the gaps? What else would you like to know more about? What about girls – who helps them?
- Do you or your parents have to prepare in any way for you to get married? [economic contributions (including bride wealth), rituals, sharing of information on what to expect (role of uncles?)] If so how? What about your sister? What are your views on these customs? Have they been changing over time and why?
- Do boys choose their wives here? What about you – what do you want? What is likely to happen to you in reality? And has this custom been changing over time – if so how? Why?

- Do girls get to choose their husbands? Why/why not? Is this changing over time? Are there particular groups of girls who have more choice in the process? What about the case of your sister or close relative?
- Do you expect to have multiple wives? What are your views on this? Is this practice changing over time?
- What happens if a boy fathers a child without being married? How does he feel? What does he do? How does the girl feel/what does she do? How do others view them? Do they view the boy and the girl differently?
- If you fathered a child without being married, what would you do?
- Is this common here? What could you do to prevent this?

Views on education

- Do most children go to school here and until what age? Are there any differences between boys and girls? is this changing over time?
- What about in your family? What are the expectations for sons vs daughters – if there are differences why?
- Who should ensure that all children go to school and to what age? Is this different for boys and girls?
- Are the experiences of boys and girls similar or different in school? If different, why?
  - Treatment by teachers (favouritism, discipline, abuse); peer relations; teaching/learning experience; school environment–safety/sanitation; leadership/participation in schools; extra-curricular activities; sports; discipline/subjects; performance; retention/dropouts
- What has your school experience been like? Are you learning important and useful things? Do you think it is preparing you well for your future? How could your education be improved?
- What about your future plans about school? Beyond school? What thinking informs these plans? Are there barriers for you to achieve those plans?
- If you have children, what would be the ideal school trajectory for your children?

Intersections between marriage and education for girls (to integrate into the questions above)

- Should an 18-yr-old girl be in school or married? What are advantages/ disadvantages? What is most common here, and are things changing over time?
- Is it common for girls to be withdrawn from school for marriage? At what age? What do you think about this? Has it been changing?
- What do you think about married girls and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any classmates or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- What about unmarried girls with children and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- Are there any special programmes that help married girls or adolescent mothers to continue their schooling? Should there be? What kinds?
- Do you think more educated girls have more problems finding husbands than less educated girls? If so why/why not? Is this changing?
- Does education have any influence in the marriage payments? For the girl? For the boy? Is this changing at all over time?
- Do you think being more educated makes girls better wives, mothers, daughters-in-law? Or do you think this may create problems? [for example….]

Do you think education makes boys/men better husbands/son-in-laws/brothers/fathers?

1.4 Focus group discussions (mothers and fathers)

Respondents: Mothers and fathers with adolescent girls – 4 per site (2 with mothers/ 2 with fathers)
Materials needed: Flip chart and markers (*if optional drawing to be done*)
Thematic focus
- Comparative views of men and women on ideals of masculinity and femininity
- Comparative views of mothers and fathers on social norms around marriage and education for sons and daughters
- Views and perceptions on changes over time
- Views and perspectives on laws, policies and programmes to address these issues

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT

- Date_____Location_____:
- Numbers of participants (at beginning):_____ (at end):_____
- Kind of participants (mothers/fathers):_____
- Ages (average):_____
- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____
- **How was the process?** Was it participatory; did everyone take part in the discussion; did anyone dominate? Did anyone walk out, why: was it difficult / easy to manage, why; were people comfortable / uncomfortable, why? etc.

Ideals of masculinity and femininity

Optional: Start with a visual – asking one of the participants to draw a picture of a man and a woman, a boy and a girl. As the discussions below advance, or at the end, conduct a brainstorming on the following and write on the flip chart:
A good girl is/does_____ A bad girl is/does_____
A good boy is/does_____ A bad boy is/does_____
A good woman is/does_____ A bad woman is/does_____

Ideals of masculinity Probe: Are these ideals changing over time?
- What are the characteristics of an ideal boy in your community? Of an ideal man? Are there any common sayings or proverbs that people use around here?
- Do you think many boys/men obtain this ideal?
- What do boys and men gain if they manage to obtain this ideal?
- What are some of the challenges faced in obtaining this ideal?
- What happens if a boy or a man is not able to obtain this ideal? (Who enforces the ideal?)
- Do some people/individuals have different ideals?
  - Men/women; Girls/boys; Religious or clan leaders; district authorities/government workers; others
- Are any of the above ideals changing over time?

Ideals of femininity Probe: Are these ideals changing over time?
- What are the characteristics of an ideal girl in your community? Of an ideal woman? Are there any sayings or proverbs that are used around here?
- Do you think many girls/women obtain this ideal?
- What do girls/women gain if they manage to obtain this ideal?
- What are some of the challenges faced in obtaining this ideal?
- What happens if a girl or a woman is not able to obtain this ideal? (Who enforces the ideal?)
- Do some people/individuals have different ideals?
  - Men/women; girls/boys; religious or clan leaders; district authorities/government workers; others

- Are any of the above ideals changing over time?

Views and perspectives on marriage

Marriage forms/types/roles
- We would like to talk about marriage in this community. Can you please describe the most common forms of marriage and marriage processes/ practices here?
  o Forms: Religious/civil/customary/cohabitation (comparative advantages/disadvantages)
  o Types: Monogamy/polygamy (comparative advantages/disadvantages)
  o Practices: Preparation; bride wealth; arranged/by choice; marital residence patterns
- Are these forms/types of marriages/ practices common throughout this district?
- Have these practices changed over time? Since when? Why/why not/ causes? What are your views/feelings on these changes/lack of changes?
- What are the qualities/characteristics that make a good husband/wife? Have these changed over time?
- What kind of husband/wife would you like for your daughter/son? (Probe on what makes a good husband and a good wife and what they most hope for their child)
- What kind of husband/wife would you NOT like your daughter/son to have? Probe on what makes a bad husband and a bad wife and what they most fear for their child)
- Do you think your spouse shares your views of ideal husbands/wives?
- Would you like your daughter's/son's marriage to be the same or different from your own? Please explain.

Early marriage
- At what age do most girls and most boys marry in this community? Has this always been the case, or is it changing over time?
- Do you know what the legal age for marriage is (for girls/boys)?
- What do you as parents (mothers/fathers) think is the appropriate age for girls to marry in this community and why?
  o Is it different for boys and why?
  o Are these views held by everyone in the community, or are there differences (Do mothers and fathers agree? Do daughters and sons agree? What about have religious leaders, district officials, government leaders, others.....?
- Do some girls marry later or not at all? Who/ which girls? [individuals or groups] Why? And how do you as parents think about this?
- Have attitudes and practices about the age at marriage evolved over time and if so how and why? (How do these attitudes and practices compare with the time you were married?)
- Are there some ideas/ customs/ attitudes that promote or discourage girls' marriage at early or late age [separate when you ask people so as not to get muddled!]? Have these ideas/attitudes etc. changed over time? Why? In what ways?
- Are there specific people/groups who actively work to maintain girls marrying at age X? [fill in early expected age of marriage] Who are these people? Why does their opinion carry weight? / Why are they influential?
- Are there specific groups working to move the desirable age of marriage for girls? Who are they? [If national level actors] How are their views communicated/ conveyed at local level? Does their opinion carry weight here? Why?

Incentives: *For each probe as follows: Are the gains economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?*
- What are the incentives for parents to marry their girls at an early or later age?
- Why are the incentives for girls to marry at an early or later age?

*Sanctions***:** *For each probe as follows: Are the gains economic? Social? Legal? Mixed?*
- If you as a parent want your daughter to get married early and she refuses, what happens?
- If you and your spouse disagree about the age at which your daughter marries, what happens?

- If you as parents are not willing to marry their daughter off early, what happens?
- If the expected age of marriage here differs from the legal age, how do people decide what to do? What motivates this decision-making process? What happens?
- If a girl gets married or cohabits early without informing you first, what happens?

Special questions on children outside of marriage (*Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?*)
- Is it common for girls in this community to have children before they are married? Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?
- What effect (positive/negative) does having a child have on an unmarried girl's life? (Physical, social, economic, schooling, marriage prospects, others)
- How do you as parents view girls having babies when not married? How do others view this? (Relatives, authorities, future marriage partners....) and how does the unmarried girl view herself?
- What do you as parents do if your son/daughter has a child without being married?
- What differences are there in having a baby when married or unmarried?
- Does having a baby when not married create any particular problems/challenges for the girl?
- Which is worse for your daughter – getting married at an early age or getting pregnant without being married?
- How are boys who father children when not married viewed by the community? How do they view themselves?
- Do boys who have fathered children when not married usually take some responsibility for them? If so, what? If not, why not?

Laws, programmes, policies and services
- What are some of the existing laws, programmes or policies around marriage – particularly early marriage?
   o What do you think could/should be done to strengthen these?
- What are some of the existing laws, programmes or policies around adolescent pregnancy?
   o What do you think could/should be done to strengthen these?
- What are some of the services that exist to help young married couples in their family life?
   o What do you think could/should be done to strengthen these?

Views and perspectives on education

- Do most children go to school here and until what age? Are there any differences between boys and girls?
- Is the situation in education different from in your time? (i.e., did most girls/boys go to school, until what age, etc.)
- What about in your family? What are your expectations for your sons vs daughters – if there are differences why?
- Who should ensure that all children go to school and to what age? Is this different for boys and girls?
- Are the experiences of boys and girls similar or different in school? If different, why?
   o Treatment by teachers (favouritism, discipline, abuse); peer relations; teaching/learning experience; school environment –safety/sanitation; leadership/participation in schools; extra-curricular activities; sports; discipline/subjects; performance; retention/dropouts
- What have your daughters' school experience been like? Are they learning important and useful things? Do you think it is preparing them well for their future?
- What could be done to improve education – for girls/for boys?
- What about your daughters' future plans about school? Beyond school? What thinking informs these plans? Are there barriers for them to achieve those plans? Any difference between your sons and daughters?

Intersections between marriage and education for girls
Integrate into questions above if possible

- Should an 18-yr-old girl be in school or married? What are advantages/ disadvantages? What is most common here, and are things changing over time? *(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- Is it common for girls to be withdrawn from school for marriage? At what age? What do you think about this? Has it been changing? *(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- What do you think about married girls and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have friends or relatives who have had any experience of this? *(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- What about unmarried girls with children and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this? *(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- Are there any special programmes that help married girls or adolescent mothers to continue their schooling? Should there be? What kinds?
- Do you think more educated girls have more problems finding husbands than less educated girls? If so why/why not? Is this changing? *(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- Does education of the girl or the boy have any influence in the marriage payments/bride wealth? *(Ask also about their own daughters/sons)*
- Do you think being more educated makes girls better wives, mothers, daughters-in-law? Or do you think this may create problems? [for example….]*(Ask also about their own daughters)*
- Do you think education makes boys/men better husbands/son-in-laws/brothers/fathers? *(Ask also about their own daughter/sons)*

1.5 Inter-generational trio

INSTRUCTIONS
- Start – if possible – by interviewing the grandparents or mothers in order to have a baseline to compare with the daughters
- The first set of questions are for the grandparents and parents
- The second set of questions are for adolescent girls,

Respondents
- 3 generations of women – grandmother, mother, daughter
- 2 with in-school girls; 2 with out-of-school girls; all unmarried.
- Likely due to girls marrying and moving away that would be working with younger girls – 13-15 yr olds? [*key is the three generations – even if a younger girl would be ok…*]

Thematic focus:
- To explore shifts in the relative importance and framing of norms and practices around marriage and education across 3 generations

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON TRIO (to attach)

- Date_____Location_____:
- Names of full trio.
    - Grandmother_____
    - Mother_____
    - Girl :_____
Notes on the process: (Challenges in finding everyone; different residential places; other....)

A. QUESTION GUIDE: GRANDMOTHERS AND MOTHERS (Intergenerational trio)
- Date:_____Place_____
- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Age at marriage
- When you were a child, what were the ideas and customs/beliefs as to when a girl should get married? And what age did they usually get married?
- What were the ideas/customs/beliefs as to why a girl should get married at a particular age? [e.g. honour, fertility, virginity].
  - *Have these ideas on age of marriage been changing over time? Since when? What do you think about the changes?*
- What were the reasons for you to get married at the age you did? [e.g. filial piety, obedience, resistance, reluctant agreement, willingness]
  - Were your reasons for getting married at the age you did in line with common attitudes and customs? Why/why not?
  - If they were in line with typical attitudes/customs, what were the positive gains that you expected from following the attitudes/customs? And were these gains realised?
  - If it wasn't in line with typical attitudes/customs, what were the expected consequences from resisting the typical attitudes/customs? And what happened in practice [to you or to others]?
- Did your family support your approach or not? If so why/why not?
  - If they didn't support you, was there ever any threat or practice of violence? Would violence have made a difference to your views/ practice?

Type and forms of marriage
- What was the type and form of marriage that was typical in your day (religious/customary/civil; polygamous/monogamous) and what type did you have?
  - *Is this changing today? If so, since when? How and why?*
- Did you choose your partner? Why/why not? How did you feel about that?
  - *Have these processes been changing over time? Since when? How, why, why not? What do you think about the changes?*

Processes and preparations for getting married
- What was the process for getting married when you got married? [economic preparation [bride wealth, dowry, material to prepare etc./ rituals…]. What were your views about this?
  - Has this process been changing *over time? Since when? How, why, why not? What do you think about the changes?*
- Who told you what to expect during the marriage process and after marriage? What was your experience?
- Who if anyone provided you with information or guidance on marriage and sexuality? What sorts of things did you get information/guidance on? Is it helpful? What were the gaps? What else would you have liked to have known more about?

o *What about girls today – who provides them with information/helps them prepare for marriage? Explain any differences from your day.*

Main reasons/expectations of marriage
- What were the main reasons to get married when you were growing up (children? security? companionship? social acceptability? prestige? other?)
- What were your reasons?
  o *Have reasons for getting married changed today? If so, how? Since when? What do you think about the changes?*
- Before you got married how did you view marriage? What did you think it would bring you? Did you have any concerns? After you got married, did your views stay the same or change? Why?
- Who did you turn to when you had problems in your marriage? What kind of help did you receive?
- *If your daughter / granddaughter has problems in her marriage, who can she turn to and how can they help her? What kind of services do you think could be provided to support people in marriage and family life?*
- What were your expectations in terms of marriage age for your daughter? And for your granddaughter? Have they been met? Why/why not?

Special questions on children outside of marriage (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- Was it common in your time for girls in your community to have children before they are married? Did you know of girls who did?
  o *Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?*
- What effect (positive/negative) did having a child have on an unmarried girl's life in your day? (Physical, social, economic, schooling, marriage prospects, others)
  o *Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?*
- What about the boys who fathered children outside of marriage? How were they usually viewed? What did they usually do in your day? Did they take responsibility for them?
  o *What happens today?*
- Which is worse for your daughter /grand-daughter – getting married at an early age or getting pregnant without being married?

Education for girls.

Her experiences
- Did most girls go to school when you were growing up? Why or why not? If so, until what age?
- If you went to school, tell us about your schooling experience. Was it any different from your brothers? If so, how?
- If you went and dropped out, would you have liked to have continued in school? Why/why/not? What prevented you from this?
- Did school experiences vary for boys or girls? If so, how and why?
  o Attitudes/treatment by teachers; attitudes of parents; length of schooling; time for homework; school environment/ facilities; getting to school – distance/transport
- Have you been influenced by any particular role models? E.g. teachers, older sisters, successful business women, community leaders.
  o How? In what way? How did this change your perspective as to what you could be? Relationships with others etc…
- Did going to school / not having gone/having dropped out of school have an influence on your later life?
  o Material; psycho-emotional; intellectual; social capital

Perceptions of changes
- *Do you think that ideas/attitudes/customs around girls' education have changed since your day? If so, how and why? What were the drivers of change? What do you think about these changes?*
- What were your expectations in terms of education for your daughter? And for your granddaughter? Have they been met? Are they the same or different vis-à-vis your expectations for your sons/grandsons?

Intersections between marriage and education for girls
[to integrate into discussion above and ensure to probe perceptions of change over time…]

In your day…
- Would an 18 yr old girl have been in school or married? What were the advantages/ disadvantages?
- *Have things been changing over time and if so how?*
- Was it common for girls to be withdrawn from school for marriage? At what age? What did you think about this?
- *Has it been changing? What is it like today?*
- What did you think about married girls and schooling? Were you aware of any laws on this? Did you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- *What about today?*
- What about unmarried girls with children and schooling? Were you aware of any laws on this? Did you have any friends or relatives who had any experience of this?
- *What about today?*
- Were there any special programmes that help married girls or adolescent mothers to continue their schooling?
- *What about today? Should there be? What kinds?*
- Do you think more educated girls had more problems finding husbands than less educated girls in your day? If so why/why not?
- *Is this changing nowadays? What is it like today?*
- Did education have any influence in the marriage payments? In what way? For the girl? For the boy? *Is this changing nowadays? What is it like today?*
- Do you think that being more educated would make you a better wife, mother, daughter-in-law? Or do you think this would have created create problems? [for example….]
- *Is this changing nowadays? What is it like today?*
- Do you think education made boys/men better husbands/son-in-laws/brothers/fathers?
- *Is this changing nowadays? What is it like today?*

B. QUESTION GUIDE: DAUGHTERS (Intergenerational trio)

- Date:_____Place_____
- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker_____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Specific background information on the daughter
- Name:_____
- Age:_____Ethnic group_____Religion_____
- Marital status _____
- If married; type of marriage_____; children?_____
- Current household living arrangements (extended or nuclear family; who is living in the household? Who is considered the household head?)_____
- In school? _____If not in school, what level reached (if any) _____
- What level of education do your siblings have? If dropped out did your brothers leave school at the same age/grade? What about sisters? If different, why? _____
- Would you have liked to have continued in school? Why/why not? _____
- What is your occupation (subsistence, income etc.)? _____

Marriage

Age
- What are the current ideas/customs/beliefs as to when a girl should get married?

- At what age do girls usually get married today? Is this different from the time of your mother/ grandmother?
- What are the ideas/customs/beliefs as to why a girl should get married at a particular age? [e.g. honour, fertility, virginity].
- <u>If married</u>: at what aged did you marry? Was this in line with general expectations? If not, what happened when you married at the age you did? Did anyone try to stop you from this?
- <u>If not married</u>: at what age do you expect to get married? Is this in line with general expectations? If not, what will happen if you do not get married at the age you are expected to?

Types and forms of marriage
- What type of marriage is typical today (religious/customary/civil) and what type <u>do you have/ expect to have?</u>
- What about polygamy/monogamy? Which is more common today and what type <u>do you have/ expect to have?</u>

Processes/preparation
- What are processes for getting married today? [economic preparation [bride wealth, material to prepare etc./ rituals…]. What are your views about this? Do you think these processes are changing?
- <u>Did you/Do you</u> expect to choose your partner? Is this what is usually done? What happens if you refuse to marry a partner chosen for you?
- Who usually informs girls about what to expect during marriage? Has anyone told you what to expect during the marriage process and after marriage? What was your experience?
- Has anyone provided you with information or guidance on marriage and sexuality? If so, who? What sorts of things did you get information/guidance on? Is it helpful? What were the gaps? What else would you like to know more about?

Expectations of marriage
- What do you expect to get out of marriage? What do you think it would bring you? Do you have any concerns?
- Who do you think you can you turn to if you have problems in a marriage? (relatives? Religious leaders? Others?) Are there any services to support you in your family life?
- Do you think that there have been any changes in ideas/attitudes/customs around marriage from the time of your mothers/grandmothers to today? If so, how and why? What were the drivers of change? What do you think about these changes?
- Do you expect your marriage to be the same as or different from the marriage of your mother? Please explain.

Special questions on children outside of marriage (Probe for all: Have there been any changes over time?)
- Is it common for girls in your community to have children before they are married? Do you know of girls who have?
  - *Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?*
- What effect (positive/negative) does having a child have on an unmarried girl's life? (Physical, social, economic, schooling, marriage prospects, others)
  - *Has this been changing over time? If so, how and why?*
- What about the boys who father children outside of marriage? How are they usually viewed? What do they usually do? Do they take responsibility for them?
- Which do you think would be worse for you - getting married at a very early age or getting pregnant without being married?

Education for girls.

- If you went to school, tell us about your schooling experience.
  - *Where? When? For how long? Did you stop? Why did you stop? How did you react? Would you have liked to have continued? What was/is positive? What was/is challenging?*

- Do school experiences vary for boys or girls? If so, how and why?
  - *Attitudes/treatment by teachers; attitudes of parents; length of schooling; time for homework; school environment/ facilities; getting to school – distance/transport*
- Have you been influenced by any particular role models? E.g. teachers, older sisters, successful business women, community leaders.
  - *How?; In what way?; How did this change your perspective as to what you could be?;Relationships with others etc…*
- Do you think that going to school / not going to school will have an influence on your later life?
  - *Material; psycho-emotional; intellectual; social capital*
- Do you think that ideas/attitudes/customs around girls' education have changed since *over time (since your mother's/grandmother's time)?* If so, how and why?
  - *What were the drivers of change? What do you think about these changes?*

Intersections between marriage and education for girls [integrate into the above, if easier. Probe perceptions of change over time…]

Today
- Is an 18-yr-old girl likely to be in school or married? What are the advantages/ disadvantages? Have things been changing over time and if so how?
- Is it common for girls to be withdrawn from school for marriage? At what age? What do you think about this? Has it been changing?
- What do you think about married girls and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who have had any experience of this?
- What about unmarried girls with children and schooling? Are you aware of any laws on this? Do you have any friends or relatives who had any experience of this?
- Are there any special programmes that help married girls or adolescent mothers to continue their schooling? Should there be? What kinds?
- Do you think more educated girls have more problems finding husbands than less educated? If so why/why not? Has this been changing?
- Does education have any influence in the marriage payments? In what way? For the girl? For the boy?
- Do you think that being more educated will make you a better wife, mother, daughter-in-law? Or do you think this may create problems? [for example….]
- Do you think education makes boys/men better husbands/son-in-laws/brothers/fathers?

1.6 Marriage Networks

INSTRUCTIONS

Respondents:
- Start with girl and husband as the centre of analysis (Questions A). Then interview the parents and in-laws (Questions B); also include at least 1 paternal aunt (Questions C)

Thematic focus
- Intra-household relations including power relations and decision-making
- Views and expectations of marital roles and responsibilities
- Sources of support for married girls

Materials required:
- Flip chart and markers

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT ON THE NETWORK

- Date_____Location_____:
- Names of full network.
  - Girl _____Husband_____
  - Girl's mother_____ Girl's father _____
  - Boy's mother_____ Boy's father_____
  - Paternal aunt_____

Notes on the process: Any challenges in identifying/locating/interviewing the different members of the marriage network? Did they live in different communities/areas?

A. QUESTIONS FOR THE GIRL AND HER HUSBAND (marriage network)

- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker_____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Specific background information on the girl and her husband

- Name _____Relation (husband or wife))_____
- Age:_____
- Residence_____
- Ethnic group_____Religion_____
- When married (age/date)? _____
- Any children? How many/gender and ages?_____
- Residence after marriage (with parents/parents-in-law/ on their own (specify if same or different village)_____
- Current household living arrangements (extended or nuclear family; who lives in the household?) _____
- Schooling: In school? Level? If left when and why (age/level0? _____How did you feel about it at the time?
- What level of education do your siblings have? If dropped out did brothers/sisters leave school at the same age/grade? If different, why? _____
- Would you have liked to have continued in school? Why/why not? _____
- What is your occupation (subsistence, income etc.)? _____

Views on marriage and childbearing

- What type and form of marriage did you have? [customary/religious/civil; monogamy/polygamy]. How did you feel about this and why? Were the views the same as your parents? If no, how was this difference resolved?
- Was your marriage arranged or did you choose your partner? What are your feelings about this? Was your opinion sought? Is this the same as or different from your parents?
- Did anyone provide you with any information, instructions or physical preparation for marriage before you were married? Please explain. Are these preparations the same as in your parents' time?
- What did you or family have to prepare for your marriage – e.g. bride-wealth/goods? How did this make you feel? Is there any change in this practice from your parents' time?
- How is life different for you now vs unmarried peers or relatives? How do you feel about these differences?
- Did your marriage have any impact on your education/schooling? In what way?
- Has anything about your education had any impact (positive/negative) on your marriage?

- What did you expect from married life? What has really happened? Has marriage fulfilled your aspirations or not? How/why?
- What is the biggest change being married has made in your life?
- Do you have children? (how many/ages/gender)
- How many children are you expected to have? How many would you like to have?
- Does it matter if girl or boy?
  - To you? To your husband/wife? To your parents? To your in-laws?
- What would happen if you don't have children?
- Do you (your wife) have access to SRH services? Do you (your wife) use them now/before marriage? Why/why not?
  - For girl: What does your husband or in-laws think about this?
  - For boy: What do you think about this?
- If you have a child, did you (your wife) give birth in hospital or home? Were there any complications?
- What are your hopes and worries for your family currently and for the future?
- Do you think your marriage is different from your parents? In what way and how?

Intra-hh power relations/decision-making

- How would you characterise your experience as a married woman/man?
  - What is expected of you?
    - By mother in law /father in law?
    - By your own mother/father?
    - By your husband/wife?
  - What do you feel about those expectations?
  - Is it difficult or easy to meet those expectations?
  - What happens if you don't meet these expectations?
- Who is considered the head of your household?
  - What roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority does that person have?
  - What resources are under that person's control?
- What roles, responsibilities or decision-making authority do you have? What resources do you have control over?
- Do you think your experience within your married household is common around here? Why/why not?
- Do you think these roles and relations in the household have changed over time?
- Have household living arrangements (ie who is living together in the household) changed over time?

Time use chart
Ask the husband and the wife to draw a pie chart indicating how they spend their time on different activities; then discuss the difference and the implications.

- How would you describe an ideal wife/husband?
(A good/bad wife is/does_____; A good/bad husband is/does_____

Sources of support

- On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being very unhappy and 10 being very happy, where would you put yourself and why?
- In many households there are tensions/ differences between household members at different times. Does this happen here and if so between whom? How are the tensions manifested – does this ever result in violence? If so how do you deal with this situation? Do you feel you have adequate support?
- What links, if any, do you have with your natal family (mother/father/siblings)? If so, with whom, how, how frequently? Would you like more or less contact or ok with the status quo?
  - For girl: What links, if any, do you have with your paternal aunt? If so, with whom, how, how frequently? Would you like more or less contact or ok with the status quo?

- What links, if any, do you have with your childhood friends/ friends from natal residence? If so, with whom, how, how frequently? Would you like more or less contact or ok with the status quo?
- What is your main source of psycho-emotional support?
- What kinds of additional forms of support/programmes of support do you think would be useful to you to support you in your family life? (Include all forms of support – psycho-social/legal/education/economic...).

B. QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS AND PARENTS-IN-LAW (Marriage network)
- Time start: _____   Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____
- Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Specific background information on mother; father; mother-in-law; father-in law
- Name _____Relation (girl's father/mother; boys' father/mother_____
- Age_____Religion_____Ethnic group_____
- Current marital status_____When married (age/date)? _____
- What type/form of marriage? (monogamy/polygamy; civil/religious/customary/ cohabitation)
- How many children? Ages? Where living?
- Residence pattern after marriage?
- Current household living arrangements: extended or nuclear family (who lives in the household)
- Schooling? If left when and why? What were your feelings at the time?
- Would you have liked to have continued in school? Why/why not?
- What is your occupation (subsistence, income etc.)?

Themes to focus on with parents and parents-in-laws

Their own marriage
- Tell us a little about your married life? How would you characterise your experience as a married woman/man?
  - What was expected of you? (at first/over time?)
    - By mother-in-law/father-in-law?
    - By your own mother/father?
    - By your husband/wife?
  - How did you feel about those expectations?
  - Was it difficult or easy to meet those expectations?
  - What happened if you didn't meet these expectations?
- Who was/is considered the head of your household?
  - What roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority does/did that person have?
  - What resources are/were under that person's control?
- What roles, responsibilities or decision-making authority do/did you have? What resources do/did you have control over?
- Do you think your experience within your married household is common around here? Why/why not?
- Do you think these roles and relations in the household have changed over time?
- Have household living arrangements (i.e. who is living together in the household) changed over time?
- How would you describe an ideal wife/husband?

Their view on their daughter/son's marriage
- What are your hopes for your children's marriage?
- How was the partner selected – and what criteria led to the choice or acceptance of the choice?
- Did you and your child agree on this?
- Would the decision have been different if it were a son/daughter?

- Did you and your spouse agree? Why /why not?
- What do you think about the ages at which your daughter/daughter-in-law was married?
- What preparations [economic, information, guidance, skills training] were entailed in the marriage transaction? What did you think about this? Did it go as expected? How is this similar or different to your day?
- What are your views and expectations about the spouse? Are they being realised?
- Were there trade-offs with the daughter/daughter-in-law's schooling? What were your feelings about that? Satisfied/regrets?
- What are your expectations of your daughter/ daughter-in-law / son/ son-in-law?
  o Economic support; care work; psycho-emotional support; reproduction – children; community standing; social capital
- What are your expectations for grandchildren?
  o How many? Grandsons vs granddaughters? Care expectations? What happens if the couple doesn't have any?
- Do you know of any problems or tensions in the marriage/ tensions (of your children)
  o What kinds? What do you do? What do your counsel your children to do? Are there support structures?
- Frequency of interaction between parents and married daughter?
- What do you think would be good to have as programmes of support for married couples (man/woman) (include all forms of support – psycho-social/legal/economic/educational.... etc.)

C. QUESTIONS FOR THE PATERNALAUNT (marriage network)

- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____

Specific background information on the paternal aunt (in addition to general ones at outset)
- Name _____Relation (paternal aunt)_____
- Age_____Ethnic group_____Religion_____
- Residence (place_____ Household (living with whom?) _____
- Marital status/ and type/form_____
- Any children? How many/boys/girls ages? _____
- Schooling?_____
- Occupation (subsistence, income etc.)? _____
- Occupation (subsistence/income etc) of husband (past/present)_____

Themes to explore

Marriage and education
- Can you tell us a little about your marriage?
  o Age at first marriage
  o What type/form
  o Preparations for marriage
  o Residence pattern on marriage
  o Age at birth of first child
  o Expectations of marriage vs realities
- What do you feel about
  o Different kinds of marriage contract: bride wealth? polygamy? unmarried girls having children?
- Do you see any changes in the way marriage is practiced in this community? What changes and why? What do you think about these changes?
- What do you think the appropriate age of marriage is (for girls/boys)?
- Which is worse: getting married early or having a child without being married?

- What makes the ideal husband/wife?
- What do you think about education for girls?
  - Until what age should girls remain in school? Until what age do girls in this community usually stay in school? Has this been changing over time?
  - Is education considered more important for boys than for girls? If so, why? What do you think?
  - What has been the effect of education for girls and marriage? (positive and negative; age at marriage)
- Do you think educated girls/boys make better marriage partners?

Role of paternal aunt in marriage preparation
- What is the role of the paternal aunt in the life of her niece?
  - Is this role important only during marriage processes or does it go beyond that?
  - Why is the paternal aunt so important?
  - What happens if a girl does not receive preparations from her paternal aunt?
  - Are there any changes over time?
- Can you describe your role as paternal aunt for your niece?
  - Before, during and after the marriage process?
  - What was expected of you with your niece?
    - What did you do? What kinds of information did you give? How did you prepare for this?
  - What are the benefits to the girl?
  - What did you gain out of this?
  - Were there any challenges in this role?
  - Do you have other nieces for whom you fulfil the same role?
- Do boys have similar relatives who perform functions of preparing them for marriage?
- If you have a daughter – did you provide her with pre-marriage information, or was that provided by her own paternal aunt?
- Do girls get sexual and reproductive health information from any other sources, besides the paternal aunt?
  - From whom and what do you think about it?
- What kind of additional services do you think girls need to help them in their marriage and family life?

1.7 Case studies (typical cases and outliers)

INSTRUCTIONS

Respondents
- Girls/ young women aged between 16-25 years. The below are examples rather than exhaustive…
  Apparently positive
- Girls with tertiary education – e.g. from the community but could be residing elsewhere now such as capital cities
- Girls who are married but continued with their education
- Girls who have a child but continued with their education
- Girls with a successful business /income-generating opportunity
- Girls who proactively escaped early marriage
- Girls who entered into love marriages /relationships

  Apparently negative
- Girls who were married early [and willingly] and have very constrained life opportunities
- Unmarried girls who had a child early and have very constrained life opportunities
- Girls who dropped out of school early or who never had an education (e.g. housemaid)
- Girls who were married early but unwillingly but gave in due to social norms
- Girls who were trafficked or forced into marriage
- Divorced/separated/widowed/abandoned girl
- Girls who were married at a young age as a second/third etc wife into polygamous households

- Examples of adolescents would fall at one end of the spectrum or the other (full compliance/non-compliance/transformation)
- Perspectives on these situations (feelings about; reasons for; consequences of...); available sources/programmes of support; recommended additional support needed

Materials needed: Flip chart and markers; tape; pins; drawing table

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO COLLECT

- Date_____Location_____:
- Name _____Age_____.
- Case study type_____
- Current Residence (place) _____ household (with whom?) _____
- Education_____
- Marital status/children_____
- Ethnicity_____Religion_____
- Parents' marital status/residence_____
- Parents' main occupation/livelihood (mother/father)_____
- Current livelihood (herself/ her husband, if applicable)_____

- Time start: _____ Time end: _____
- Facilitator(s):_____Note taker: _____
- Language in which the interview was conducted: _____
Note: Describe why this girl was selected for a case study: ie she is an example of_____

Warm-up: Timeline
Start by drawing a timeline of their life until now – divided by positive and negative experiences/key events and ask them to talk about their life history and how they evaluate it.

Themes to cover include [but as appropriate depending on girl in question]:
Life stages including positive and negative experiences
   a) Education
   b) Adolescent transition (e.g. menstruation, sexuality etc.)
   c) Marriage
   d) Pregnancy/childbirth
   e) Child rearing
   f) Family relationships and fortune/misfortunes
   g) Occupational/income-earning history
   h) Care work – within their natal home, marital home
   i) Health history
   j) Migration history

Informal and formal support
   k) Support people e.g. peers, friends / networks/ organisations
   l) Access to services (e.g. health, school, justice, credit/economic assets, legal aid)
   m) Access to media, technology, phones, internet and the role this has played in their life and wellbeing
   n) Role models; people they look up to; inspiring individuals (can be family, service providers, famous people)
   o) Recommendations for other types of support needed (psycho-social; legal; economic; information/education; other.....)

Assessing life quality – past, present and future

p) Assessment of their life trajectory compared to siblings and/or others and drivers thereof
q) Views on role that community and family attitudes/values/practices/beliefs have played in shaping or constraining their trajectories
r) Aspirations and how they have evolved over the course of adolescence
s) Aspirations for their own children/future offspring

Potential framework life history discussions

Work Sexual maturation/health school Home life					
Changes in: Marriage Girls' education	Birth	five years	10 years	15 years	2010

1.8 Key Informant Interview Guides

A. NATIONAL LEVEL

Date and place of interview: _____

Name of key informant: _____Gender:_____

Ministry/Department /Agency/Institution: _____

Function: _____

Facilitator: _____

Interview start: _____ End_____

Key categories of respondents;
- Government: Ministries of 1) Gender, community development and youth; 2) Education; 3) Health (SRH for adolescents); other?
- Development partners: UN (UNICEF and UNFPA); DFID; other bilateral...key international NGOs (Plan, World Vision; others?)
- Local NGOs/CSOs
- Academics : legal experts; others
- Religious authorities

Introductions:
Thank KI for taking the time to meet with us. Introduce team and explain research context (DFID-funded multi-year/multi country study). Follow up to year 1 research on broad capability domains for adolescent girls (results presented at national stakeholder meeting in August). Explain year 2 research aims: to explore in more depth social norms around early marriage (and different marriage forms/practices) and adolescent girls' capabilities – particularly in education. Year 2 will be looking at 2 different communities to try to understand change and persistence in social norms and practices around early marriage and education. Utlimate aim: to contribute to knowledge base to address discriminatory social norms in order to enhance gender justice for adolescent girls and young women.

Background information (will depend on respondent)
- Key programmes and policies respondent is involved in
- Overview of issues around young people in general, and adolescent girls in particular – what are the key challenges?
- What are some of the programmes underway to address these challenges?

Key questions to explore:[25]
- **Overview of marriage forms and practices that may inhibit adolescent girls' capabilities (*probe throughout for changes overtime*)**
  - Forms of marriage (monogamy; polygamy)
  - Type of marriage contract (civil, religious, customary)
  - Customary practices (arranged marriages; marriage by abduction);
  - Practice of bride price; age differential between husband and wife;
  - Women's roles/rights/responsibilities within marriage;
  - Issues of consent to marriage; issues to do with the dissolution of marriage (divorce /widowhood /abandonment);
  - Domestic violence...

- **Existence and scope of problem of early marriage in Viet Nam**
  - Is there a problem? At what age do girls normally get married? Does it vary from place to place? By ethnic group and/or religion? By urban/rural? At what age do you think girls should get married? Boys?
- **Causal factors for persistence in social norms and practices around early marriage**
  - Why do girls continue to marry at early ages? How are social norms for early marriage enforced? Who is most responsible for keeping these norms alive? Are these factors different in different places?
- **Consequences of early marriage**
  - Educational / physical / psycho-social....
- **Changes in social norms and practices around early marriage**
  - Any changes over time? In particular regions? Urban/rural? How/where/why are norms and practices around early marriage changing?
- **Adolescent pregnancy and childbirth outside of marriage**
  - Is this a common problem in Viet Nam? Or is it rather rare? Does it vary from place to place? What factors lead to differences?
  - Has the situation been changing over time?
  - Is pregnancy/childbirth out of marriage accepted by the community (by families, by religious leaders, by others)
  - Existing laws, policies and programmes to address this.
  - What more needs to be done?
- **Laws/policies and programmes to address issues of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (in particular) and gender equitable marriage practices (in general)**
  - Existing laws, programmes and policies? (Who is doing what? What seems to be working best? What are some of the key challenges?)
  - Recommended laws, programmes and policies? (What more is needed? Suggestions for moving forward)
- **Girls' education: progress and challenges**
  - Key issues in girls' education in Viet Nam today (Primary? Secondary? Tertiary?)
  - Factors contributing to progress in girls' education
  - Challenges to progress in girls' education
  - How are social norms around girls' education changing over time (or remaining the same)? (Does this vary from place to place? How/why?)

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25 Precise questions and focus on the interviews will depend on the nature of key informant (role, specialty, etc.)

- o Any specific linkages between early marriage/girls' education (including drop-outs due to early marriage/pregnancy; lack of parental investment; parental desire for bride wealth...)
  - o Existing laws/programmes/policies to promote girls' education (Describe progress and challenges)
  - o Problems of gap between policies/programmes on paper and implementation on the ground
  - o Recommendations on what more is needed to move forward on girls' education
- **Specific suggestions/recommendations for the research**
  - o Other key issues to explore;
  - o Further references/ and sources of information
  - o Additional stakeholders/programmes/key informants
  - o Particular information re: Ha Giang, Meo Vac

B. DISTRICT/SUB-DISTRICT LEVEL

Date/place of interview: _____

District/Sub-district/Parish: _____

Name: _____Gender_____

Ministry/Department /Agency/Institution: _____

Function: _____

Facilitator _____

Time: Start: _____ End_____

Key categories of respondents
- Local government representatives (LC; technical departments such as Gender, CD, Youth; other)
- Teachers, health workers, community development workers, child protection officers, police, justice officials
- Religious leaders
- Cultural leaders
- Other elders, including women's group leaders
- CSOs, NGOs, project personnel

Introductions:

Thank KI for taking the time to meet with us. Introduce team and explain research context (Dfid-funded multi-year/multi country study). follow up to year 1 research on broad capability domains for adolescent girls (results presented at national stakeholder meeting in August). Explain year 2 research aims: to explore in more depth social norms around early marriage (and different marriage forms/practices) and adolescent girls' capabilities – particularly in education. Year 2 will be looking at 2 different communities to try to understand change and persistence in social norms and practices around early marriage and education. Utlimate aim: to contribute to knowledge base to address discriminatory social norms in order to enhance gender justice for adolescent girls and young women.

Background issues on district/locality
- Population; main sources of livelihood; religions; ethnic groups;
- Services (schools/training institutes; health structures; social centres; commercial centres)
- Overview of issues around youth/young people
- Overview of key issues around gender

Key questions to explore:[26]
- **Basic forms of marriage and marriage practices that might have implications for girls:**
  - o Forms of marriage (monogamy; polygamy);
  - o Type of marriage contract (civil, religious, customary);
  - o Customary practices (arranged marriages; marriage by abduction);
  - o Practice of bride price; age differential between husband and wife;
  - o Women's roles/rights/responsibilities within marriage;

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26 Exact questions and focus will depend on the key informant (role, specialty, etc.0

- o Issues of consent to marriage; issues to do with the dissolution of marriage (divorce/widowhood/abandonment);
- o Domestic violence...
- o Probe in particular on issues around the proposed reform of Marriage and Divorce Bill
- **Existence and scope of problem of early marriage in Mayuge** *(Mayuge in general – at district level; and specific communities at sub-district level)*
  - o Is there a problem? At what age do girls normally get married? Does it vary from place to place? By ethnic group and/or religion? By urban/rural?
- **Causal factors for persistence in social norms and practices around early marriage**
  - o Why do girls continue to marry at early ages? How are social norms for early marriage enforced? Who is most responsible for keeping these norms alive? Are these factors different in different places?
- **Consequences of early marriage**
  - o Educational/physical /psycho-social....
- **Changes in social norms and practices around early marriage**
  - o Any changes over time? In particular areas/communities? Urban/rural? How/where/why are norms and practices around early marriage changing?
- **Adolescent pregnancy and childbirth outside of marriage**
  - o Is this a common problem in Vietnam? Or is it rather rare? Does it vary from place to place? What factors lead to differences?
  - o Has the situation been changing over time?
  - o Is pregnancy/childbirth out of marriage accepted by the community (by families, by religious leaders, by others)
  - o Existing laws, policies and programmes to address this.
  - o What more needs to be done?
- **Laws/policies and programmes to address issues of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy outside of marriage (in particular) as well as gender equitable marriage practices (in general)**
  - o Existing laws, programmes and policies
    - At national level
    - Implementation at local level (Who is doing what? What seems to be working best? What are some of the key challenges?)
  - o Recommended laws, programmes and policies (What more is needed? Suggestions for moving forward)
- **Girls' education: progress and challenges**
  - o Key issues in girls' education (Get details on education statistics/infrastructure/enrolments and any district-level reports available)
  - o Factors contributing to progress in girls' education
  - o Challenges to progress in girls' education
  - o How are social norms around girls' education changing over in time (or remaining the same)? (Does this vary from place to place? How/why?)
  - o Any specific linkages between early marriage/girls' education (including drop-outs due to early marriage/pregnancy; lack of parental investment; parental desire for bride wealth...)
  - o Existing laws/programmes/policies to promote girls' education (Describe progress and challenges in implementation at local level)
- Recommendations on what more is needed to move forward on girls' education **Specific suggestions/recommendations for the research**
  - o Other key issues to explore?
  - o Further references/ and sources of information on Ha Giang/Meo Vac
  - o Additional stakeholders/programmes/key informants?
  - o Other?

1.9 Areas of inquiry

Use these themes as a background checklist, especially during training of the research teams to make sure important issues are captured. It doesn't have to be exhaustive but do try to get a rich complex picture of key concerns etc.

Broader context

Ideological dimensions/ context	- Religion - Political ideologies - Ethnic identity - Socio-economic system - Social/community prestige [community pressure] - Patriarchy

Marriage

Sub-themes	
Family codes	- Family codes – formal (national laws) and informal - Inheritance laws and practices [including for widows] - Divorce – ease of / views about / consequences / conceptualisation thereof - Polygamy, monogamy - Civil, religious, customary - Cohabitation - Son preferences - Age of marriage [includes definitions of adolescence] / readiness for marriage
Services	- access to family planning (practical and social) - access to justice [child support, divorce, abandonment]
GBV	- marriage by abduction - partner age gaps
Sexuality	- virginity - value of fertility - knowledge brokers / aunties/ schools/ peers /media - honour/shame/chastity - Taboos about menstruation before marriage
Economics	- bride price - dowry - hope chests/preparation of goods… - inheritance - commodification of girls' labour - migration - son preference - economic security
Care economy	- gender division of labour - expected roles of husband and wife – ideal vs reality - ritual privileging
Kinship and affinity	- Residence patterns - Choice of spouse (parents vs girls; identifying partner and related processes) - Inheritance - Lineage/name
Psycho-emotional wellbeing	- Affection vs indifference - Love vs hatred - Companionship vs loneliness/lack of communication

• Protection /security vs fear • Happiness vs sadness/ depression • Respect vs lack of respect • Identity vs alienation • Belonging /inclusion/ vs isolation • Social acceptance vs stigma • [Positive deviance….]	

Education

Supply		Demand	
Access to school	• Distance • Boarding schools • Safety/security/en route	Costs	• direct • indirect [school donations, uniforms etc • opportunity costs –foregone child labour • extra-tuition
		Girls' mobility	• • logistical • normative
Educational content	• Relevance of curriculum • SRH curriculum • Textbooks – gender stereotypes • Ideologies – embedded in curricula [moral/ etiquette/ natural laws of feminity] • Lifeskills • Gendered disciplines	Gender division of labour	• Time poverty • Son preference • Household chores
Teacher/learning processes	• Discrimination of girls • Discrimination of minority/socially excluded children • Female teachers; senior women teachers • Language of instruction • Class size • Performance/ assessment • Teacher favouritism • Teacher use of girls' vs boys' labour in classroom	Household conditions	• Lack of light for study
Physical environment	• Toilets /sanitation / menstruation facilities [access to pads/ napkins etc.] • School meals	Family/peer support	• Economic investment • Parental encouragement • Friends • Role models • mentors
Safety and security in schools	• Teacher violence / abuse • Student violence/bullying • Physical punishment	Outcomes of education	• Material • Perceived economic value • Opportunities post-education • Psycho-social • Aspirational • Status attached to education

			• Perceived psycho-emotional value – confidence, wellbeing, self-esteem, new horizons • Curiosity, questioning, understanding • Raised expectations • Intellectual ability • Higher capabilities • New knowledge • New information
Extra-curricular activities	• School clubs • Sports • Mentors • Career guidance • Participation in school governance	Barriers	• Physical/ body • Early pregnancy • Menstruation • Sexuality • Body image / physical appearance • Psychosocial • Stigma re overage in school • Lack of sense of belonging in school environment • Mixed aged classes • Fears of scaring of prospective male partners… • Peer pressure • Son preference
National policies	• Compulsory free education • Re-entry policies • Social protection related to education (stipends, cash, inkind transfers) • Mixed age	Informal education	• Learning outside of school environment • Other sources of information • Learning family traditions/ skills etc.
Alternative education	• Nonformal education • Religious education • Vocational education /training		

1.10 Coding Matrix

Instrument
Location
Demographics
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Married? If so, at what age.
- Household composition, with gender and age
- Occupation of HH members

Marriage Age Norms
- Normal age at marriage and thoughts as to why this age as opposed to another
- Changes to age norm?
- Changes attributed to?

Customs

- "Dating" or meeting?
- Whose chooses partner?
- Preparation for boy's marriage
- Prep for girl's marriage
- Details of ceremony
- Costs of marriage?
- Financial negotiation?
- Relationship between bride-price and education?
- Kidnapping/dragging incidence/exposure/stories?
- Divorce incidence/exposure/stories?
- Re-marriage incidence/exposure/stories?
- Treatment of children after re-marriage
- Spinsterhood
- Any notable generational differences in customs
- Drivers of generational shifts
- Any gender differences to highlight

Archetypes
- Good girl/daughter
- Good boy/son
- Good husband
- Good wife
- Good daughter-in-law
- Good son-in-law
- Good mother
- Good father

Marriage
- If married, what was "wanted" out of marriage? If unmarried—what is "wanted"?
- If married, has reality matched up?
- What do you want for your daughter/son out of marriage?
- GBV in HH?
- Thoughts re normalcy of GBV?

- Thought re causes of GBV/ generational shifts/solutions.

Education
- Thoughts on local demand for education
- Global thoughts on the advantages of education
- Thoughts on the irrelevancy of education
- Education costs/distance/local encouragement
- Gender add-ons
- Thoughts on the nexus of education and marriage—NOT age related
- Any noted relationship between education and the age of marriage

Fertility
- SRH contact/information
- Ideal family size/composition
- Who chooses?
- What if no kids?
- What if sex/pregnancy outside of marriage?
- Childbirth experiences

Forces supporting early marriage/restrictive norms
- Cultural beliefs
  - Re cultural cohesion—the "Hmong" way
  - Hmong interest in being NOT Kinh
  - Re girls' role in terms of HH work
  - Re girls' role in terms of marriage/reproduction
  - Re family honour and pre-marital sex
  - Re pride in being able to afford to marry son early
  - Re old age care and need to have children young
  - Re son preference in terms of the practical old age care that only sons can provide
  - Re son preference and education
  - Re son preference and lineage and custom
  - Re son preference and higher fertility
  - Re physical and social isolation of girls
  - Filial piety
- Agrarian reality and age of marriage
- Agrarian reality and fertility
- Lack of questioning
- Lack of information re laws
- Fear of social sanctions for non-compliance
- Rewards for compliance

Forces working for change
- Economic improvements
- Technology
- Infrastructure
- Legal change
- Top-down mobilisation ("carrot" oriented)
- Top-down mobilisation ("stick" oriented)
- Hmong mobilisation/snow-balling
- Girl-driven (marriage too much work/clothes/adolescence is better than adult roles)

- Role models

- Community support to be outlier
- Rewards for becoming an outlier

Impact of social institutions
- Family structure
- Schools
- CSOs
- Local governance
- Government programming
  - Education
  - Health
  - GBV
  - Poverty

Impacts on capabilities
- Education
- Economic
- Physical
- Emotional
- SRH

Girl agency/decision-making stories

Services/knowledge wanted

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