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**WG6: Evidence-Based Public Policy Making**

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Title **Beliefs or Policy? Assessing Child Marriage and the Case of Public Policy in Nigeria**

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**Abstract** Though Nigeria is the biggest economy and highest populated nation in Africa, its policy instrument on child marriage is problematic. One of the key policy problems in Nigeria is child marriage law, which is supported by the constitution (law) as an instrument and at the same time illegal by the same law (constitution). The operation of the formal and informal (eg. Islamic religion norms) law of the country has made the issue of child marriage more complex and pluralised. But the issue of morality, right, and the law give policymakers a 'window of opportunity' to amend this inhuman act. Moor (1997) argued that changing or amending the law as an instrument or resource in the public policy is a complex one, however, laws whose normative character become or risk of becoming devalued need to be re-examined and change. Nigeria's political-administrative system and actors' interest in policy decision process towards child marriage worth exploring so as to improve child development and achieve sustainable development.

Objective: This study examines how the political-administrative system and institutional mechanisms drive policy developments in Nigeria and the consequent impact on children. It also explains Nigeria's Political decision on child marriage, using some selected public policy theories. The question is; why is Nigeria's political administration process on the child marriage a public policy issue? How do institutions (religious bodies, political administrative authority, and process (parliament), and the legislative (law) clash with actors or interest players (politicians) which are the main instrument to ensure the child policy development (reforms of child marriage law)? Using a case study analysis and qualitative approach by reviewing literature such as Journal, articles, Nigeria government reports, news publications, parliamentary proceeding reports and credible blogs related to study to demonstrate how policy actors and stakeholders interest influence decision outcome and the policy process towards child marriage in Nigeria. The study adopts policy theories - Advocacy

Coalition Framework (ACF), Right Base Approach and Public Choice Theory in the public policy to explain the political decision process on child marriage in Nigeria. The various actors and the complexity of the policy problem due to the interplay of values, belief, norm and tradition (culture) and law that individual interest are mix and intersect with each other may influence policy decision making and the formation of the coalition towards child marriage law amendment or the policy reform.

The study argues that child marriage still exists and policy changing may take strong opposition actors (political coalitions) as a result of the interplay of complex institutions and political actors interest, which condition child care policy developments.

This study aims at contributing to the narrative around 'good governance' in the context of developing countries by exploring the key role of political-administrative institutions and actor interactions towards an effective child development in Nigeria.