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Canadian International Development Education Programs in Fragile, Crisis, and Conflict Settings

Charlevoix Education Initiative Funding

Summary Education Report
October 2024



In partnership with

Canada





An adolescent group in Uganda, supported by Canada. **CREDIT:** Rich Townsend / Aga Khan Foundation

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OpenAI (2024) ChatGPT was used to assist with creating a concise summary of recommendations from the full report and to summarize key findings in selected charts in the full report.

The full report is available at akfc.ca.

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Cover photos (top to bottom; left to right)

A young woman outside a Canada-supported vocational training and education centre in Syria.

CREDIT: Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

A primary student in Obongi, Uganda. **CREDIT:** Rich Townsend / Aga Khan Foundation Canada

Students in a Canada-supported primary school in Moyo, Uganda.

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Executive Summary

The Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls, and Women in Developing Countries, introduced by the Government of Canada at the 2018 G7 Summit, pledged a \$400-million commitment to advancing women's and girls' education in fragile, conflict, and crisis situations.

In response, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) announced support for 26 projects across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, with funding allocated between March 2019 and 2024. This report presents summary findings from a comprehensive assessment of 21 of these projects, launched through a consultation process led by consultants contracted through Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) in collaboration with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group - Technical Working Group (CIEPWG - TWG). The consultation aimed to understand the impact and lessons learned from Charlevoix Education Initiative-funded projects in bridging the gap between humanitarian efforts and development projects or the triple nexus, particularly in addressing educational challenges within contexts affected by fragility, crisis, and conflict.



Based on the report's findings, Canada's leadership under the Charlevoix Initiative, as represented in the subset of projects reviewed, did indeed help to improve access to quality education for refugee and displaced children, including the hardest-to-reach girls and women living in regions experiencing crisis and conflict.

Critical Impacts and Findings include:

- **Alignment with Objectives:** The projects demonstrated commitment to advancing gender equality, promoting inclusive education, and supporting sustainable development, as envisioned in the Charlevoix Declaration. However, the emphasis on peacebuilding integral to the triple nexus requires strengthening.
- **Effective Strategies:** Projects effectively addressed barriers to girls' education, integrated theoretical frameworks with practical solutions, and prioritized partnerships and community engagement for sustainability.
- **Resilience and Innovation:** Projects demonstrated resilience and innovation in adapting strategies to ensure continued access to education despite challenges posed by instability and crisis dynamics.
- **Need for Flexibility:** There is a need for increased flexibility in project funding and implementation to respond effectively to emerging challenges and changing circumstances.
- **Gender-Transformative Approach:** Sustained engagement and long-term investment are required to challenge deep-rooted socio-cultural norms perpetuating educational gender disparities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at translating the impact and lessons gained from the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of projects funded through the Charlevoix Education Initiative for future gender-transformative education programming:



Recommendation 1

Capitalize and expand upon gender-transformative education gains to ensure that all children, especially girls, can access education opportunities.

Areej attends vocational training sessions in Syria. **CREDIT:** Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

While the projects were able to work to address the root causes of gender inequality, shifting societal norms and cultural attitudes toward gender equality is a gradual journey that demands time and commitment that could not be fully achieved within a 3-year project cycle. To that end, it is recommended to **continue to program gender-transformative education projects to offer scope and opportunity to address societal norms and cultures that negatively impede girls from accessing quality education.**

Future projects are recommended to **ensure gender-based analyses (GBA) are undertaken** prior to the project design. Projects should also **offer continuous training to project managers and participants (including teachers, amongst others) to reinforce and sustain the adoption of gender-transformative practices over time. Addressing barriers to access to education and promoting a successful transition from primary to secondary school** can support children and youth, particularly adolescent girls, to complete 12 years of quality education.

In addition, regarding best practices, the research found that projects that work intentionally with men and boys could address systematic power imbalances. Therefore, it is recommended that projects **work to integrate men and boys more intentionally** into activities and solutions to better address the systematic power imbalances that perpetuate gender inequality. Work with partners at all levels, including teachers, to develop and deliver a gender-transformative curriculum that addresses the root causes of gender inequality and addresses the differential learning needs of boys and girls.

To align with global research and some noted limitations within the original conceptualization of gender-transformative education, it is recommended that **future project iterations address the gendered, nuanced, and intersecting barriers to education** for girls, boys, and other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ learners, refugee learners, and children and youth living with disabilities.



Recommendation 2

Work towards improving students' learning outcomes, including literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional skills development, while strengthening education systems to deliver and track results.

Students at a primary school in Uganda. **CREDIT:** Rich Townsend / Aga Khan Foundation

The research found that while the projects focused on gender-transformative access to quality education, more needed to be done on the gains realized in learning. Therefore, it is recommended that **learning outcomes be improved and results tracked systematically**, using global and local tools that best fit the context.

Other indicators, including transition and retention rates, should be included in results frameworks to complement the measurement of learning outcomes. Moreover, a great need is identified within the research beyond primary education, which was the focus of most of the projects under the Charlevoix Initiative. **Future programming in education is recommended to consider the broad range of education opportunities, from pre-primary to tertiary, non-formal, and formal.**

The education projects had a noted impact on cross-sectoral programming, resulting in gains across the health, sanitation, and protection sectors. **Future programming is recommended to consider the holistic nature of education programming, with funding opportunities made accordingly.**

Recognizing the need for a multi-pronged approach to improving learning outcomes and the uniqueness of the education sector in measuring and realizing gains, it is recommended that all **future education projects have a minimum duration of 5 years.**

Evidence notes the specific need for quality teachers to improve learning. To that end, it is recommended that projects **expand on the good practices under the Charlevoix Initiative to continue building teachers' capacity in gender-responsive pedagogy.** In doing so and aligning with the needs of students within education in emergencies (EiE), it is recommended that **future projects promote mental health and psychosocial wellbeing** in and around the school community, social and emotional development, and skills such as collaboration, conflict resolution, social cohesion, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and respect for diversity.

Finally, it is recommended to **support safe school infrastructure and violence-free learning** environments that meet comprehensive school safety standards. This includes safety audits for travel to and from school, secure transportation, and gender-segregated and well-lit latrines.



Recommendation 3

Increase flexibility and adaptability in projects to enable adaptability to unforeseen humanitarian situations and ensure the continuation of education in emergency situations.

A Canada-supported learning centre in Syria. **CREDIT:** Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

The projects under the Charlevoix Initiative were all impacted, to various degrees, by unanticipated humanitarian crises, not least of which being the COVID-19 pandemic. Canadian partners demonstrated resilience and were able to adapt, innovate, and deliver good quality programs in ever-changing humanitarian contexts. Working in challenging contexts has highlighted the importance of delivering on Canada's commitment to support vulnerable populations in fragile states. This involves partnering with humanitarian and development organizations and host governments to improve coordination. There is a need for flexible, multi-year, gender-transformative education interventions during crises, with a focus on ensuring gender equality and access to quality education for girls and women while supporting schools as safe spaces for children.

It is recommended that **future projects incorporate peacebuilding and conflict resolution components**, which could enhance the effectiveness of future interventions in fragile contexts. Given the interlocking and compounding effects of climate change on humanitarian crises, it is recommended that **climate resilience be embedded into the project design to mitigate the impact on education systems** while building the sustainability and resilience of communities in the provision of education.

It is recommended that **projects remain flexible to adapt indicators, targets, and budgets according to the changing risks** and burdens faced when delivering projects in times of crisis. **A people-centered approach should be considered** to address the evolving needs of populations regardless of their context within the humanitarian-development continuum.

Noting the considerable effort each organization undertook to develop their projects, specific guides, manuals, and tools, it is recommended that, as much as possible, **projects under a common initiative — such as the Charlevoix Initiative — form a Community of Practice for joint learning and sharing.**



Recommendation 4

Enhance localization efforts for equitable partnerships, equal participation, strong coordination, and strengthened capacity for results for children.

Students drying reusable menstrual products at a primary school in Uganda. **CREDIT:** Rich Townsend / Aga Khan Foundation

Building upon the good practices of localization seen in initiatives in the projects stemming from the Charlevoix Declaration, it is recommended that, moving forward, **further education projects deepen efforts to localize education interventions**. This involves more comprehensively incorporating local perspectives, resources, and capacities to ensure interventions are culturally relevant and sustainable.

Future projects should build upon the commitments under the *Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative* and global best practices that deepen efforts to localize education interventions.

In addition, it is recommended that **future projects be co-created with key stakeholders**, including, but not limited to, children and their duty-bearers, to understand local needs, solutions, and approaches at all stages of implementation, promote ownership, and foster supportive learning environments in and around the school community.

The research findings were limited due to a lack of qualitative and quantitative research outside project baseline and endline monitoring. To that end, it is recommended that **more research is needed to better understand the linkages between education programs and the triple nexus of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding**.

Furthermore, **more investments and support should be made to engage with external research partners and academic institutions to gather relevant project data, including learning outcomes, throughout the project life cycle to make real-time adjustments**. This will also support evidence-based decision-making on the most effective mechanisms to deliver quality education in times of crisis.



Recommendation 5

Ensure that education is at the forefront of emergency planning and humanitarian assistance.

Students at a learning centre in Syria. **CREDIT:** Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

Noting the need for education in humanitarian response and recognizing its inherent value to protection, stability, and ensuring the rights of the child, it is recommended that **donors commit to funding predictable, flexible, multi-year gender-transformative education interventions in times of crises.**

As such, it is recommended that **appropriate and quality education programming is sustained or quickly initiated in the wake of acute emergencies, protracted crises, and recovery and reconstruction.**

The research noted gaps in effort and coordination between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation during project implementation, and therefore, it is recommended that **greater coordination among these organizations be undertaken.**

Section 1: Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for sustainable development. The Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls, and Women in Developing Countries was introduced by the Government of Canada during the G7 Summit held in Charlevoix, Canada, in June 2018 under Canada's presidency.



Section 1: Introduction

In the Declaration, G7 leaders committed to putting girls and women at the heart of the agenda by supporting quality education and skills training for girls, adolescent girls, and women in fragile, crisis, and conflict-affected situations. This included refugees, displaced peoples, returnees, and people with disabilities.

In 2019, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) announced 26 projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East that would be supported by funding linked to its Charlevoix commitments, with projects ending between March 2022 and March 2024. Figure 1 presents Canada’s contribution to the Charlevoix Declaration.

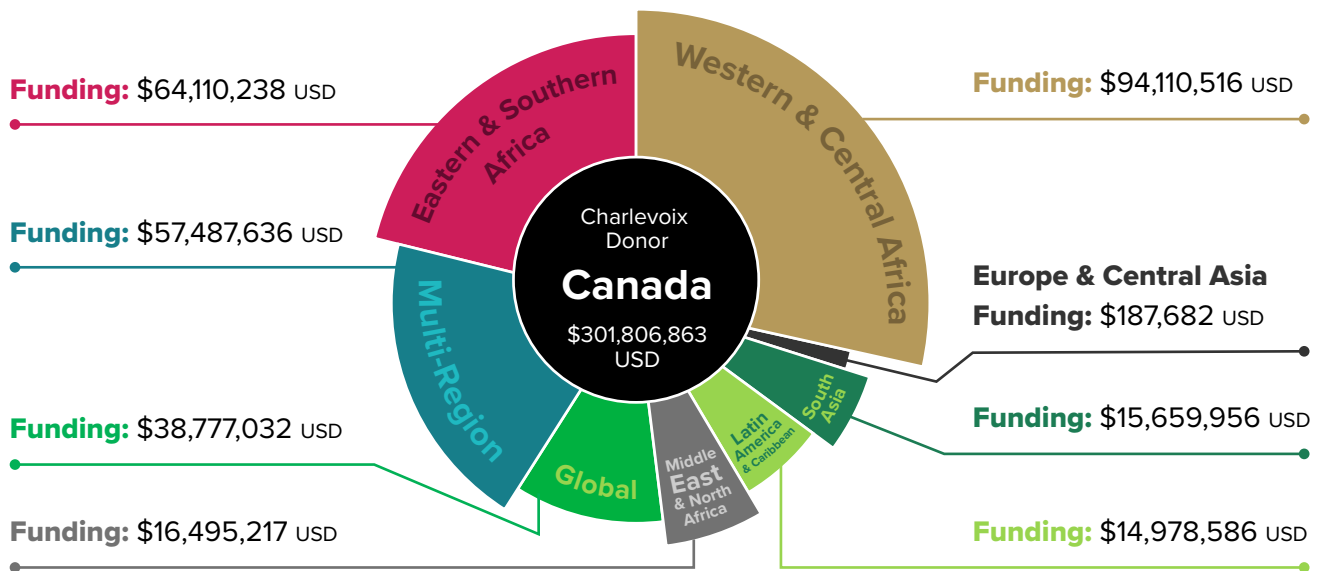


FIGURE 1: Canada’s Contributions to the Charlevoix Declaration (source: authors)

This summary highlights findings from a comprehensive research report¹ which aimed to understand the impact and lessons learned from Charlevoix Education Initiative-funded projects in bridging the gap between humanitarian efforts and development projects or the triple nexus, particularly in addressing challenges in education within contexts affected by fragility, crisis, and conflict. Practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and others with lived experience and expertise in fragile, conflict, and crisis situations will find this summary helpful in program development and funding applications.

The consultants designed and led a short-term consultation process contracted through the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) and in collaboration with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group – Technical Working Group (CIEPWG – TWG) through its Charlevoix Community of Practice.

1 Enns, C., Swardh, K. & Tagwireyi, Y. (2024). Canadian International Development Education Programs in Fragile, Crisis and Conflict Settings: Charlevoix Education Initiative Funding. Aga Khan Foundation Canada.

Section 2: Context

The geographic regions funded by Canada² continue to be impacted by ongoing conflict and increased fragility throughout the project funding cycle.

² Source: INEE (2022). Charlevoix funding dashboard:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/inee/viz/CharlevoixDashboard-English/Dashboard1>



Section 2: Context

Education has always been seen as a key metric in driving down the adverse impacts of conflict and lessening fragility—it not only provides a more workable population but also plays a necessary role in lowering adverse health, nutrition, and sanitation outcomes.

Charlevoix Declaration

The Charlevoix Declaration, declared by the G7 Leaders, highlights the **importance of gender equality and quality education for girls, adolescent girls, and women**. As part of the Charlevoix Declaration, **Canada partnered with government, civil society, and multilateral organizations to deliver education projects in developing countries with fragility, crisis, and conflict** through the Charlevoix Education Initiative in **Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East** (GC, 2021). The G7 committed to investing in girls' and women's education in developing countries, with specific obligations to close access gaps during conflict and crises and improve coordination between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.

Numerous studies and initiatives emphasize the significant benefits of quality education for girls, which positively influences their personal development and broader social and economic outcomes. However, persistent gender disparities and barriers continue to hinder girls' educational rights. **A staggering number of girls are out of school worldwide: 33 million are of primary school age, and 86 million are of secondary school age** (World Bank, 2023). These challenges are exacerbated in times of **fragility, crisis, and conflict, where girls are almost 2.5 times more likely than boys to be out of school in conflict-affected areas** (GC, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

Feminist Foreign Policy and Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

The Charlevoix Education Initiative aligns with Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality. Canada's FIAP is an initiative to "eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world... [by] promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls." (GAC, 2017, p. 8). It recognizes the interconnectedness of power structures and systems of oppression that result in current and historical processes of neglect, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization.

International Child Rights Frameworks

Girls' education is anchored in human and child rights frameworks, asserting that every girl has the **inherent right to access quality education** free from discrimination, violence, and other barriers. Several provisions within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) apply to girls' right to education. **Article 28 of the CRC** and **Article 11 of the ACRWC** acknowledge the fundamental right of every child to education. Complementing this, **Article 2 of the CRC** and **Article 3 of the ACRWC** outline the overarching principle of non-discrimination, stipulating that all rights articulated in the agreements must be universally safeguarded.

Gender Dynamics and Localization in Development Initiatives

Understanding the localization of gender roles and responsibilities is needed to critically examine how gender is perceived and operationalized in development frameworks. Rao and Tiessen (2020) investigated perceptions of feminism among Canada's partners in the Global South. They found varying attitudes towards feminist development, ranging from complete acceptance to partial acceptance, with stipulations and negative perceptions of feminism as potentially disempowering. Rao and Tiessen (2020) reported that 85% of organizations supported a feminist foreign policy, while 15% found the term 'feminist' problematic; respondents highlighted challenges in programming that disproportionately focus on women and girls, neglecting other social, economic, and cultural concerns as well as other community members including men and boys.

The historic Northern-driven and top-down framing of development assistance and foreign policy upheld colonial structures where the 'Global North' was positioned as the expert. In contrast, **transnational, intersectional, gender-equitable programming works to challenge this paradigm by deconstructing the economic, socio-cultural, and political systems that perpetuate colonial violence and imperial ideologies** (Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group, 2020).

Collaborative, nuanced approaches are necessary for bridging the gap between the conceptualization of gender dynamics in development frameworks and the practical operationalization of initiatives to promote more inclusive and effective strategies. The mutually reinforcing impact of programming is one of the key strategies of the United Nations in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, recognizing the interrelationship between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts (i.e., the "triple nexus") (Guterres, 2016; United Nations General Assembly, 2022; UNTFHS, 2022).

The Triple Nexus

The ‘Triple Nexus’ emerged from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and refers to the linkages between **humanitarian, development, and peace actors**. GAC has increasingly applied this framework to projects based in fragile contexts, including education-related projects, training, and evaluation frameworks (GAC, 2023).

Figure 2 illustrates the elements of the triple nexus. The approach aligns with the United Nations’ New Way of Working (NWoW) model, where actors are expected to work towards collective outcomes over multiple years — a critical framework when the average humanitarian crisis lasts more than nine years, with many lasting for decades (WeWorld, 2020).

The establishment of **the triple nexus brings together the political-social and economic theories that impact development and works towards establishing methodologies that have long-term benefits**. The Charlevoix Declaration commits to providing accessible quality education for girls, adolescent girls, and women in developing countries — most of which *are* fragile given the high incidence of domestic and international crises and conflict.

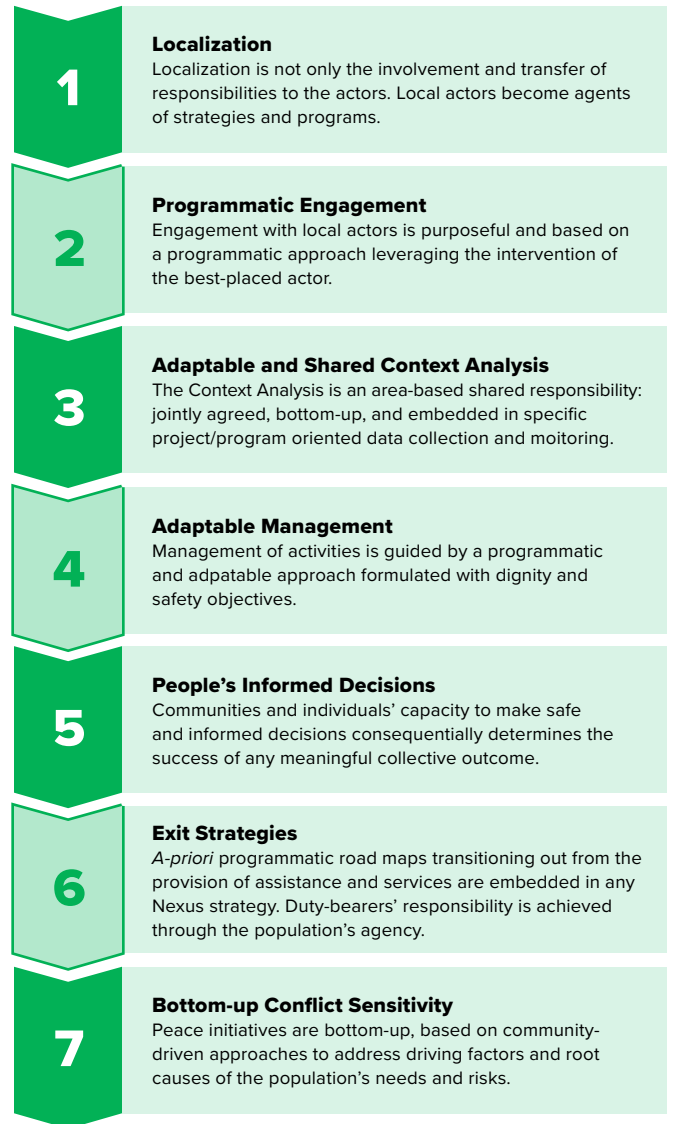


FIGURE 2: Elements of the Triple Nexus

Section 3: Methodology

This study used purposeful sampling to select organizations receiving Charlevoix funding in Canada and their representatives for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).



Students playing soccer in Moyo, Uganda. **CREDIT:** Rich Townsend / Aga Khan Foundation

Section 3: Methodology

Out of 26 eligible projects, 21 participated and were including in Africa (17), Latin America (1), Asia (1), and the Middle East (2). The research occurred from November 2023 to March 2024, with data collection from December 2023 to January 2024. The research methodology implemented a three-phase sequential explanatory qualitative approach.

In cooperation with AKFC and CIEPWG-TWG, the consultation process aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1. What approaches and theoretical assumptions guided Canadian development organizations in response to the Charlevoix Declaration?**
- 2. What were the similarities and differences across organizations?**
- 3. How do interventions, partnerships, and contextual variations impact education in contexts of fragility, crisis, and conflict within the triple nexus?**
- 4. How do organizations define and measure learning and effective pedagogical practices?**
- 5. What methods, tools, and collaborative approaches influence the monitoring and evaluation of interventions funded by Charlevoix?**
- 6. How does the dynamic or emerging context shape these methods, tools, etc.?**

For a more comprehensive understanding of the methodology and findings, please refer to the full report, which analyzes the project documents and transcripts from the FGDs.

Section 4: Discussion and Findings

The following section is based on findings and analyses of the data from the project documents, FGDs, and Change to Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), highlighting the lessons learned in the design and delivery of overseas education programs funded through the Charlevoix Education Initiative.



Besher is a volunteer at an education centre in Syria.

CREDIT: Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

Section 4: Discussion and Findings

The research found that the 21 projects, reviewed at the time of the research, aimed to reach 1,688,303 beneficiaries³, with a total of CAD \$79,727,089, or approximately 25% of the total funding committed.

Figure 3 illustrates how funding was distributed among project regions. Disaggregated data from the projects show that they aimed to reach a total of collectively of:

- 627,201 girls
- 335,008 boys⁴
- 1,454 schools and non-formal education centres
- 25,591 teachers or staff
- 4,549 community leaders and organizations
- 824 government officials
- 42,914 caregivers

Total Funding:
\$79,727,089 CAD

Total Beneficiaries:
1,688,303

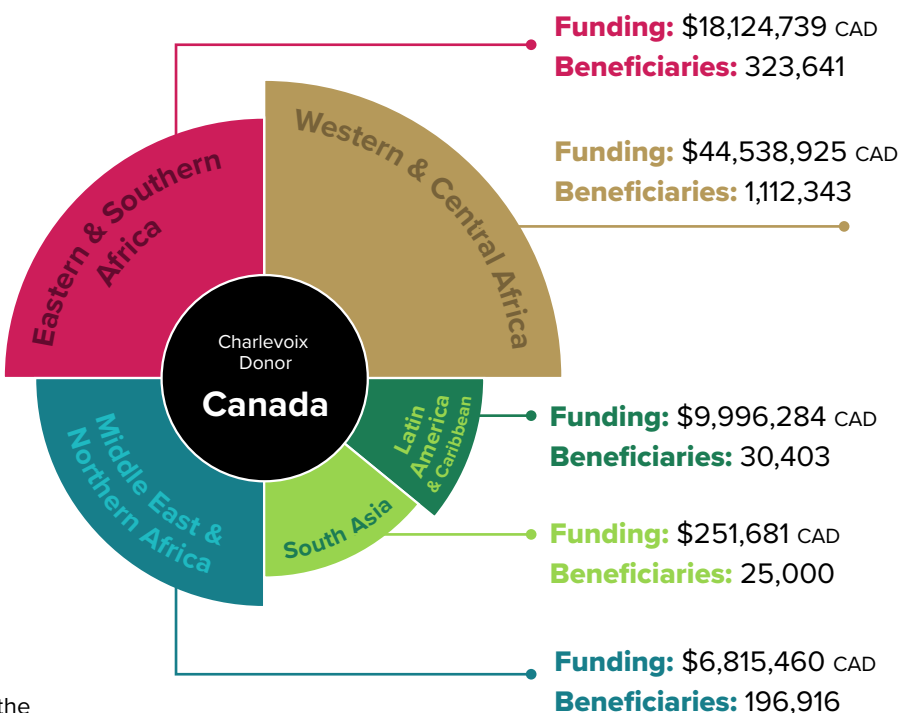


FIGURE 3: Beneficiaries and funding totals of the 21 project countries in focus by region (source: authors)

3 At the time of writing this report, only 10 projects had submitted their final report for data collection; therefore, final numbers on actual beneficiaries reached is not yet available.

4 In the FGDs, KIs, and project documents provided, there was no discourse addressing the non-binary nature of gender.

Based on our analysis, four themes emerged:

1. **Theoretical Frameworks and Approaches for Improving Education**
2. **Interventions, Partnerships, and Contextual Variations**
3. **Strategies in Fragile, Crisis, and Conflict Settings**
4. **Flexibility in Changing Circumstances**

The following section represents selected findings aligned with these four themes:

Theme 1: Theoretical Frameworks and Approaches for Improving Education

Theme 1 highlights key findings aligned with the first research question:

- ***What approaches and theoretical assumptions guided Canadian development organizations in response to the Charlevoix Declaration?***

Table 1: References to a Theoretical Framework of Approach	
Theoretical Framework or Approach	References
Human Rights and Gender-Transformative Approach ⁵	1
Community Engagement and Participatory Approach	2
Gender Analysis and Gender Mainstreaming	5
Continuous Professional Development for Teachers	1
Equity-Based Approach	1
Social Behavior Change Communication Strategy	1

As shown in Table 1, all organizations utilized various theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the importance of adapting to local contexts where actors operate. While theoretical frameworks provide valuable guidance, many projects **considered existing local barriers and contextual factors within communities to inform their work and integrate a more individualized approach.**

⁵ Gender Transformative approach linked to Education (GTE) is understood to be an extensions of “transformative education”, emerging from several pedagogic theories. <https://www.gale.info/doc/dankmeijer-publicaties/Dankmeijer-2021-My-ID-to-Be-Myself-Transformative-Education-Special-Issue-Dec2021.pdf#page=55>

Table 2 shows **critical barriers to quality education for girls** determined through the data collection (project-based document review), with further examples outlined in the full report in Appendix 2 by country and region.

Table 2: Summary of Barriers to Quality Education for Girls	
Main Theme	Description
Access and Inclusivity	Unequal opportunities for marginalized children, particularly children with disabilities.
Conflict and Displacement	Restrictions on freedom of movement and displacement of families (disrupts educational continuity); school closures and teacher migration.
Financial Constraints	Lack of household resources due to economic constraints; boys' education prioritized during financial pressures; expectations for children to contribute to family income and not attend school.
Infrastructure and Facilities	Inadequate WASH facilities and a lack of MHM products in schools; rehabilitation needs for school infrastructure.
Psychosocial Support and Training	Lack of psychosocial support for traumatized students and teachers (affects their ability to engage in education); insufficient training for teachers on gender-sensitive pedagogy and social-emotional learning.
Security and Safety	Fear due to insecurity and threats of attacks on schools impact attendance, vulnerability to violence (corporal punishment and bullying) both within and on the way to school; risks associated with roads around schools and assaults on educational institutions add to safety concerns.
Social Barriers for Migrants and Returnees	Xenophobia and tensions with host communities impact education access for migrant and returnee populations.
Gender Inequality, Socio-Cultural Norms and Practices	Rights-based issues such as violence against women and children; social norms and attitudes that stigmatize girls in schools; gender disparities in decision-making regarding education and household responsibilities impact girls' access to schooling; Girls face violence both within schools and in their communities, affecting their safety and well-being.
Teacher Skills and Training	Limited teacher skills and low literacy levels affect the quality of education, challenges in student retention and transition.

The analysis determined that the **projects demonstrate a comprehensive approach to addressing the identified barriers to girls' education across diverse regions affected by conflict and instability**. However, the study also concluded that there continue to be **persistent barriers to girls' quality education that are deeply rooted in systemic challenges and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender disparities in education**. In the FGDs and KIIs, participants discussed how these deeply ingrained beliefs about gender roles, education, early marriage, and household responsibilities that reinforce traditional gender roles and prioritize boys' education require long-term interventions.

Many of the FGD and KII participants argued the need for a **sustained approach to addressing societal attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality in education**, particularly in conflict-affected areas. A participant recommended a prolonged intervention of four to five years to effectively challenge deep-rooted gender norms and practices alongside flexible funding mechanisms prioritizing local organizations.

Theme 2: Interventions, Partnerships, and Contextual Variations

Theme 2 highlights critical findings associated with the third research question across projects:

- ***How do interventions, partnerships, and contextual variations impact education in contexts of fragility, crisis, and conflict within the triple nexus?***

Selected findings include:

- Projects collaborated closely with government bodies such as the Ministries of Education and Gender Affairs, building partnerships aligned with official educational standards and promoting sustainability. The significance of partnerships to successful projects emerged as a recurring theme within the FGDs and KIIs. Education stakeholders, notably the relevant Ministries of Education, were mentioned nine times as actively endorsing the projects.
- Trust and adaptability are essential in partnerships between international and local actors. Importantly, sustained collaboration with local stakeholders was seen as promoting ownership and capacity building to drive long-term change beyond the project duration.
- Sustainable progress toward gender equality requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and local communities. By partnering with entities deeply rooted in local contexts, educational initiatives embrace a participatory approach that values diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices within communities.

- Community-based or community-led strategies must respect cultural, social, and political factors and use methodologies for the specific contexts for effectiveness, with communities acting as agents of change. Projects understood that at the core of community-based or community-led strategies was an effort to respect the cultural, social, and political factors in each context. One project document explained the reasoning behind working with the local community (specifically boys and men) was to “address school-related and gender-based violence and mitigate backlash against girls.” Some teachers, notably men, still opposed gender-responsive pedagogy even when community partners introduced it.
- Addressing resistance from certain community segments requires ongoing education and awareness-raising efforts. While community organizations have an essential role, they are not always equipped to address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Gender dynamics are deeply embedded within broader socio-economic, cultural, and political systems, necessitating a holistic approach that extends beyond the capacities of community organizations independently.
- Organizations should engage communities comprehensively, particularly in the design phase of projects, rather than exclusively during implementation or as beneficiaries. A participatory approach can be integrated to prioritize meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation with communities.

In summary, community engagement levels varied among projects, with some showing more meaningful involvement.

Theme 3: Strategies in Fragile, Crisis, and Conflict Settings

In further response to the second, third, and fourth research questions, this third theme focuses on the projects in regions characterized by a long history of fragility and political instability, with recurring and complex conflicts:

- *What were the similarities and differences across organizations?*
- *How do interventions, partnerships, and contextual variations impact education in contexts of fragility, crisis, and conflict within the triple nexus?*
- *How do organizations define and measure learning and effective pedagogical practices?*

As with many of the regions affected by conflict, security concerns pose significant barriers to girls' education. In response, projects integrated community-based strategies such as 'risk mitigation' to proactively adapt to evolving circumstances, with examples outlined in Table 3. While participants frequently cited flexibility and adaptability as essential to project design in fragile, crisis, and conflict settings, projects must also **develop disaster risk management (DRM) and contingency plans to effectively respond to unforeseen crises and mitigate potential disruptions to program implementation.**

While acknowledging the projects’ comprehensive approach to improving education access and quality in fragile, crisis, and conflict settings, one fundamental gap is the need to integrate **specific conflict-sensitive education strategies aligned with peacebuilding under the triple nexus** within project frameworks. Although strategies in these settings were identified, the projects could benefit from incorporating peacebuilding and conflict resolution components into their interventions.

Table 3: ‘Risk mitigation’ strategies in fragile, crisis, and conflict settings based on project document analysis

Challenge	Strategies
<p>School closures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance learning packages (virtual and physical) developed collaboratively with government and local partners • Collaborated with schools to identify adaptable resources for students • Utilized radio-based/MP3 education programs • Integrated methodologies to analyze various data categories that can be done remotely; e-learning courses for teachers
<p>Heightened security concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted more KIIs rather than FGDs to avoid any potential risks associated with group discussions by directing undue attention to them, and in line with Do-No-Harm principles • Engaged community volunteers to discreetly conduct outreach and gender equality awareness activities among the broader school community, including parents, to avoid large group sessions and minimize security risks • Offering short courses in villages • ‘Exposure visits’ for teachers in comparable contexts outside the country with less restrictions on women’s movement • Conducting regular activities to seek community feedback on suggestions for safety

<p>War and conflict</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged with religious and community leaders, women’s rights advocates to foster local ownership and support for interventions, while avoiding perceptions of cultural insensitivity • Psychosocial support and resources available for beneficiaries • Increase direct and prompt communications through social media regarding scheduling changes and campus closures due to external events and disruptions • Install lockers to leave tools, laptops, and other equipment so beneficiaries do not have to carry valuable items in public during incidents of unrest
<p>Climate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed programs acknowledging the devastating impact of climate change on pastoralist families, particularly on the education of their children who are often the most excluded. Climate change was not referenced directly often.
<p>Financial Constraints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were given drinks and biscuits during the project activities to support their attention and engagement in regions where children did not have equitable access to food • Cash and vouchers to reduce financial burden on girls’ parents who met the criteria for vulnerability • Scholarship programs • Partnering with existing support for school feeding programs
<p>Gender-based violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborated with boys and male mentors to address school-related and gender-based violence, mitigate backlash against girls, and increase safety at school by building a broad support base • Targeted spouses, partners, or family members of young women • Ensured beneficiaries have access to technology for reporting violence and obtaining support, including hotlines and referral systems • Including men’s success stories • Girls in several programs were empowered with tools and training to defend themselves when faced with school-related SGBV

<p>Weak education structures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted proven local systems strengthening approaches to address systemic challenges in education systems, focusing on capacity-building at the local government and school level • Used approaches that did not undermine or run parallel to the relevant Ministry of Education • Ensured interventions are integrated and aligned with existing structures to maximize impact and sustainability
<p>Emergencies and changing contexts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracked emerging trends and worked closely with community and government stakeholders to adjust project implementation • Allocated contingency funds within the budget to mitigate negative impacts of emergencies on project beneficiaries • Integrated a disaster risk management plan • Kobo Toolbox using tablets • In terms of the level of preparedness and capacity, there is understanding about the risks of potential disasters, but bureaucratic delays and lack of gender-sensitivity in scenario-planning inhibit the response

Theme 4: Flexibility in Changing Circumstances

In addition to addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was discerned from the research that **all projects encountered multiple intersecting and unforeseen obstacles that influenced their implementation:**

- political instability or unrest
- electoral processes
- environmental and climate-related issues
- adverse weather conditions such as heavy rains
- migration patterns
- armed conflict
- coups
- economic downturns
- security concerns
- technological hurdles
- disruptions in supply chains
- occurrences of natural disasters
- legal disputes

However, with the support of local partners, projects successfully adapted to changing circumstances in their strategic approaches. The focus group discussions and key informant interviews highlighted the importance of being flexible in response to changing circumstances. Participants stressed the significance of having trust and confidence in the ability of implementing partners to adapt to uncertainties and make necessary changes. Local partners are often best placed to recognize evolving needs on the ground and suggest suitable actions. Projects require more flexible contractual agreements and funding to respond rapidly to unforeseen challenges.

Section 5: Conclusion

The research summarized in this report affirms that the **collective outcomes of the 21 Charlevoix projects studied align with the articulated objectives and vision outlined in the Charlevoix Declaration.**





Students learn about Syria's cultural heritage through cardboard models.
CREDIT: Christopher Wilton-Steer / Aga Khan Foundation

Section 5: Conclusion

The Charlevoix-funded projects have shown commitment towards advancing gender equality, promoting inclusive education, and supporting sustainable development—central to the Charlevoix Declaration’s intended objectives.

The projects have effectively addressed the barriers preventing girls from receiving quality education, integrated theoretical frameworks with practical solutions, and taken a holistic approach to education, including well-being. The projects prioritized partnerships and community engagement to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Lastly, the projects’ efforts in fragile, crisis, and conflict settings demonstrate their dedication to addressing complex challenges and contributing to resilience and development in vulnerable communities.

Therefore, based on our findings, the **Charlevoix-funded projects have adopted and implemented a wide range of interventions to improve access to quality education for girls in fragile, conflict, and crisis situations.** Our research shows that certain projects faced uncertainty due to the widespread impact of instability, fragility, and the unpredictability of conflict dynamics. However, the projects indicated that collaborating with local partners (including community-based organizations, religious organizations, and women’s organizations), government education stakeholders, and other international partners helped them navigate these challenges more effectively.

Despite these challenges, projects demonstrated resilience and innovation in adapting to changing circumstances. Strategies such as distance learning packages, community-based outreach, and psychosocial support were implemented to mitigate risks and ensure continued access to education. While projects implemented innovative solutions for continued access to education, peacebuilding and conflict resolution components needed to be more explicitly incorporated into interventions. **Please see the Executive Summary for selected recommendations.**

The triple nexus approach represents a paradigm shift in conceptualizing and addressing challenges in fragile contexts. It recognizes that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts are not siloed but are intricately interconnected and mutually reinforcing. However, despite the theoretical appeal and potential of the triple nexus approach, translating its principles into practice poses significant challenges. The evidence from our findings indicates persistent obstacles to aligning frameworks, strategies, and action plans across the ‘conflict’ aspect of the nexus initiatives. A specific consideration was the need for projects to develop disaster risk management and contingency plans to effectively respond to unforeseen crises and mitigate disruptions to program implementation.

Another noteworthy finding was the challenges projects faced in navigating donor frameworks and guidelines, which often constrain their ability to respond effectively to emerging challenges. Participants emphasized the need for GAC to adopt a more flexible and responsive approach to project funding. The discrepancy between donor expectations and on-the-ground realities can create tensions and frustrations for project implementers. Suggestions for adaptive programming, including flexible work plans and non-linear theories of change, can also enhance agencies’ responsiveness to crises and prioritize relevant aspects of the nexus (Garcia, 2022).

Many projects aimed to embrace a **gender-transformative approach** to achieving the goal of providing quality education to girls. However, it was widely recognized that this approach requires a longer timeline and more significant resources due to the persistence of systemic challenges and socio-cultural norms perpetuating gender disparities in education. It was agreed across different project regions that these barriers are deeply rooted and cannot be addressed in relatively short-term timelines. These approaches require sustained engagement and long-term investment in capacity-building to be effective.

Future research is needed to better understand the linkages between education programs and the triple nexus of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding, considering climate-related challenges.

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