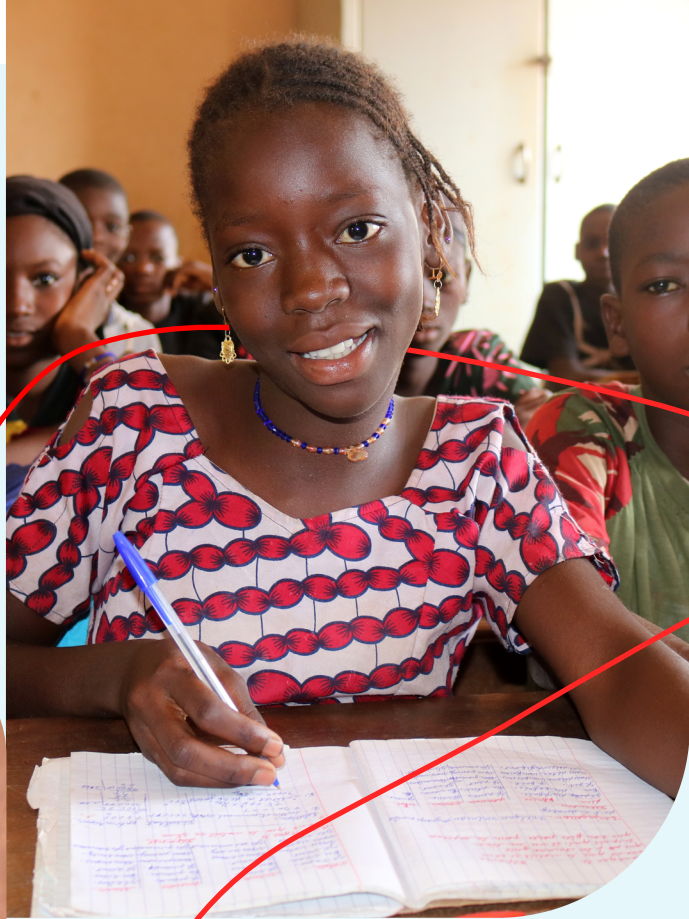




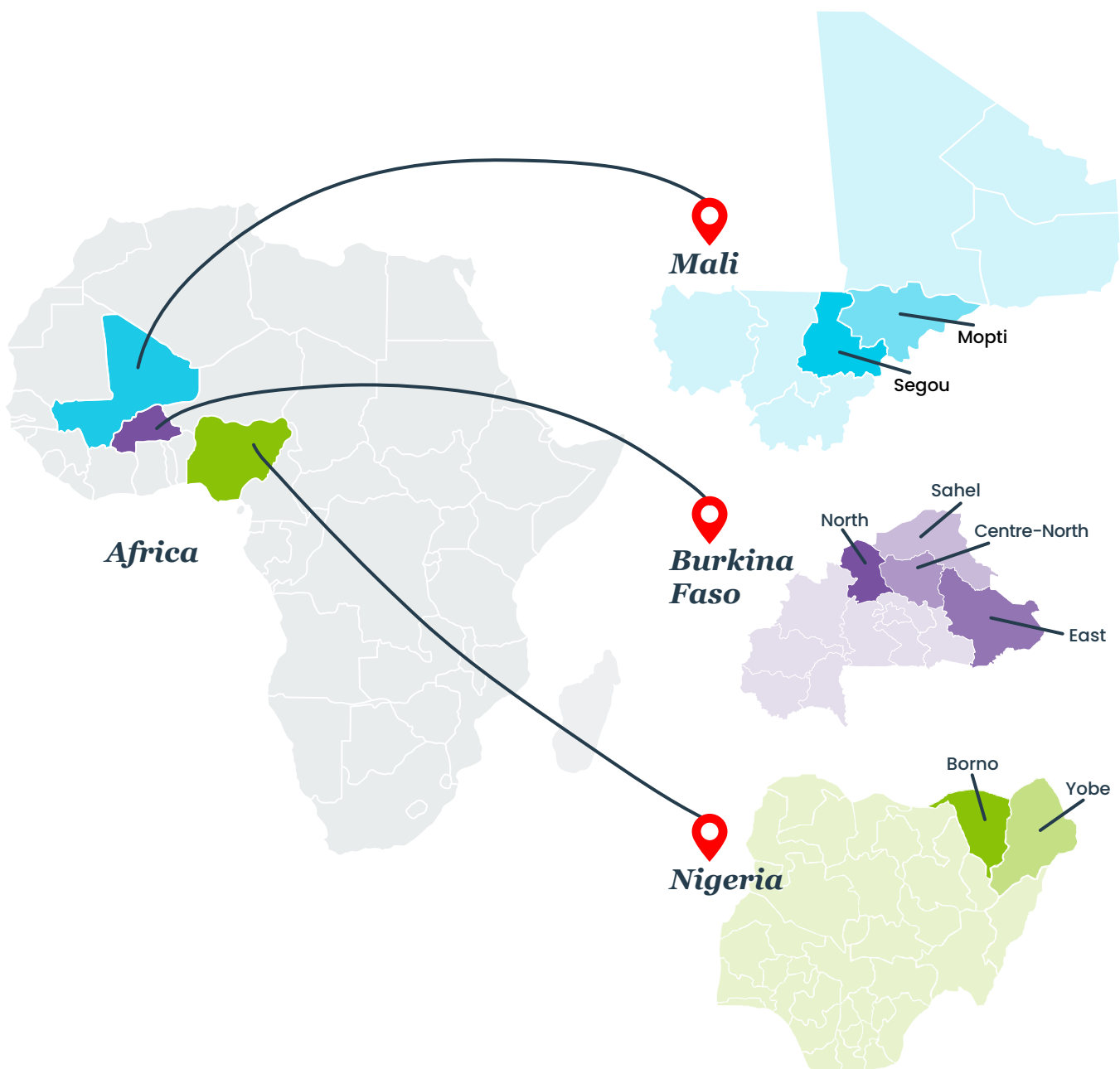
Until we are all equal



Education in Emergencies:

*Insights from **Nigeria, Mali**
and **Burkina Faso***

The Charlevoix Education Initiative was a \$400 million commitment to advancing women's and girls' education in fragile, conflict and crisis situations. Grants from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) were implemented across 26 projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, with funding allocated between March 2019 and March 2024. As part of this, Plan International Canada received three grants amounting to \$47.9 million to implement three projects in Nigeria (EiC Nigeria), Burkina Faso (FASST) and Mali (IMAGINE). This knowledge brief distills five years of learning from these projects to inform donors and development practitioners working on education projects in crisis settings.



Education is a powerful tool that brings about significant positive changes, especially for girls. It's widely acknowledged that when girls receive a quality education, they experience remarkable improvements in both their social and economic well-being. But the benefits don't stop there. Educating girls has a ripple effect that extends beyond the individual; it positively impacts their families and communities as well. When girls have access to quality education, they gain the knowledge and confidence needed to make informed decisions about their health, education and overall life choices.

However, when humanitarian situations and conflict arise, how do we ensure that vulnerable children, particularly girls, maintain access to quality education? In these situations, girls are the first to be affected as they are more likely than boys to be removed from school, more exposed to sexual and gender-based violence and more vulnerable to early and forced marriage, among other injustices. Recognizing the urgency, Plan International tackled this dilemma between 2019 and 2024 with an initiative spanning three crisis-affected nations: Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali. The response aimed to not only safeguard girls' access to quality education but also transform learning spaces into safe havens of resilience, protection and empowerment.

What's at Stake

In recent years, humanitarian crises and conflict across Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali have led to school disruptions, displacement and a security situation that continues to deteriorate, among other consequences. Compounded by widespread poverty, these circumstances have forced many families to keep children out of school, with boys' education often prioritized over girls'. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the situation as it resulted in nationwide school closures for six months in Mali and Nigeria and four months in Burkina Faso. As a result, many children were forced out of school and many have not returned, especially girls and low-income students.

To respond to the crises, Plan International, in collaboration with local implementing partners, designed a project to educate vulnerable and

hard-to-reach girls in **northeastern Nigeria**. This project was called **Education in Crises (EiC)**, and from 2019 to 2023, Plan International implemented interventions to increase girls' access to education through programming that was tailored to their specific needs and contexts. The conflict in the region began well before Plan's arrival. Since 2009, northeast Nigeria has been severely affected by the insurgency of non-state armed groups. This violence has particularly affected girls, students and teachers, resulting in a devastating impact on education and safety. Early and forced marriage is on the rise as a result of the disproportionate impact of this crisis on girls. By January 2020, 611 teachers had been killed, 19,000 teachers displaced, 910 schools damaged or destroyed and over 2,000 women and girls abducted.

In **Burkina Faso**, non-state armed groups have also caused increased insecurity in the country since 2016 by attacking police stations, military camps, state buildings and schools, among others. Between 2020 and 2024, Plan International, in partnership with the Stromme Foundation, responded to the conflict by implementing a project that sought to support girls between the ages of six and 16 with access to quality education. The project, known as **Strengthening Girls' Rights to Complete Their Education Safely and on Time (FASST)**, addressed girls who were directly affected by the evolving security situation. The stakes for girls in Burkina Faso are incredibly high, as they face barriers to education and increased vulnerability due to the ongoing conflict and displacement. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has risen steadily, with 2,062,534 IDPs as of March 2023, comprising 1,088,050 women and 974,484 men. Of these IDPs, 1,029,014 were children aged zero to 14 (49% of whom were girls). Since 2024, 5,319 schools have closed, leaving 818,149 students (48% of whom are girls) out of school. This situation had repercussions on the

implementation of the project, with the suspension or relocation of certain learning activities in accelerated-learning centres or schools.








In **Mali**, political instability following two military coups d'état within the previous decade; international economic sanctions; persistent social inequalities; demographic pressure; and growing food insecurity linked to climate change are all factors that have exacerbated the crisis and increased humanitarian needs in the country. This context has resulted in complex challenges for the education sector. Attacks on schools, with direct threats against teachers and communities, caused teachers to flee and schools to close and profoundly affected the quality of and access to education. In response, Plan International, in partnership with World Vision and Save the Children, implemented a project to ensure inclusive, quality education for adolescent girls by tackling the root causes of gender inequalities and the interrelated barriers they face across two central regions of Mali. The project, known as **Improving Adolescent Girls' Inclusive Education (IMAGINE)**, was active from 2020 to 2024.

“


In our community, many girls don't go to school, and among those who do, there are a lot of dropouts. That's why girls' education is a challenge that I've decided to get particularly involved in. ***Mariam's schooling gives me great hope that she will become a future leader in this country.***”

—GRANDFATHER OF MARIAM, AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD PARTICIPANT IN THE IMAGINE PROJECT



	EiC	FASST	IMAGINE
 LOCATION	Northeastern Nigeria – Borno and Yobe states	Burkina Faso – North, Centre-North, Sahel and East regions	Mali – Segou and Mopti regions
 PARTNERS	IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: Plan International Nigeria, Centre for Community Health and Development (CHAD) International and GOALPrime Nigeria	CONSORTIUM PARTNERS: Plan International Burkina Faso and Stromme Foundation	CONSORTIUM PARTNERS: Plan International Mali, World Vision and Save the Children
 BUDGET	CAD \$10.7M	CAD \$16.6M	CAD \$20.6M
 TOTAL REACH	167,187 learners, including 86,387 girls 	129,613 learners, including 69,382 girls 	253,015 learners, including 124,764 girls 

Programming Approach



Each project was guided by a comprehensive theory of change, designed with the principal objective of advancing gender equality and improving educational opportunities for girls. The programming approach across each project consisted of two core focus areas:

01
Addressing
gender-related barriers
that hinder girls from
accessing quality
education

02
Working to ensure
education opportunities
in formal and
non-formal settings

Addressing Gender-Related Barriers that Hinder Girls from Accessing Quality Education

Each project was guided by a comprehensive theory of change that placed gender equality at its core. A key strategy to addressing gender-related barriers involved engaging communities and building local capacity to support girls' education. This meant working closely with community leaders and members to dismantle the social and cultural barriers that often prevent girls from attending school.

To ensure that girls could learn in safe and inclusive environments, the projects implemented gender-responsive teaching practices and learning approaches. These were particularly emphasized in each project's accelerated-learning initiatives. Accelerated-learning programs (ALPs) played a vital role in creating safe, inclusive and culturally relevant educational opportunities for girls. These programs enabled girls—especially

those who were out of school, over-age or living with disabilities—to catch up on missed education and transition into formal schooling.

Across each project, economic barriers were addressed by offering financial assistance through cash transfers and vouchers, which helped families afford to send their daughters to school. Beyond financial support, the projects also provided menstrual-hygiene kits, school meal programs and take-home food rations to ensure that adolescent girls could continue their education.

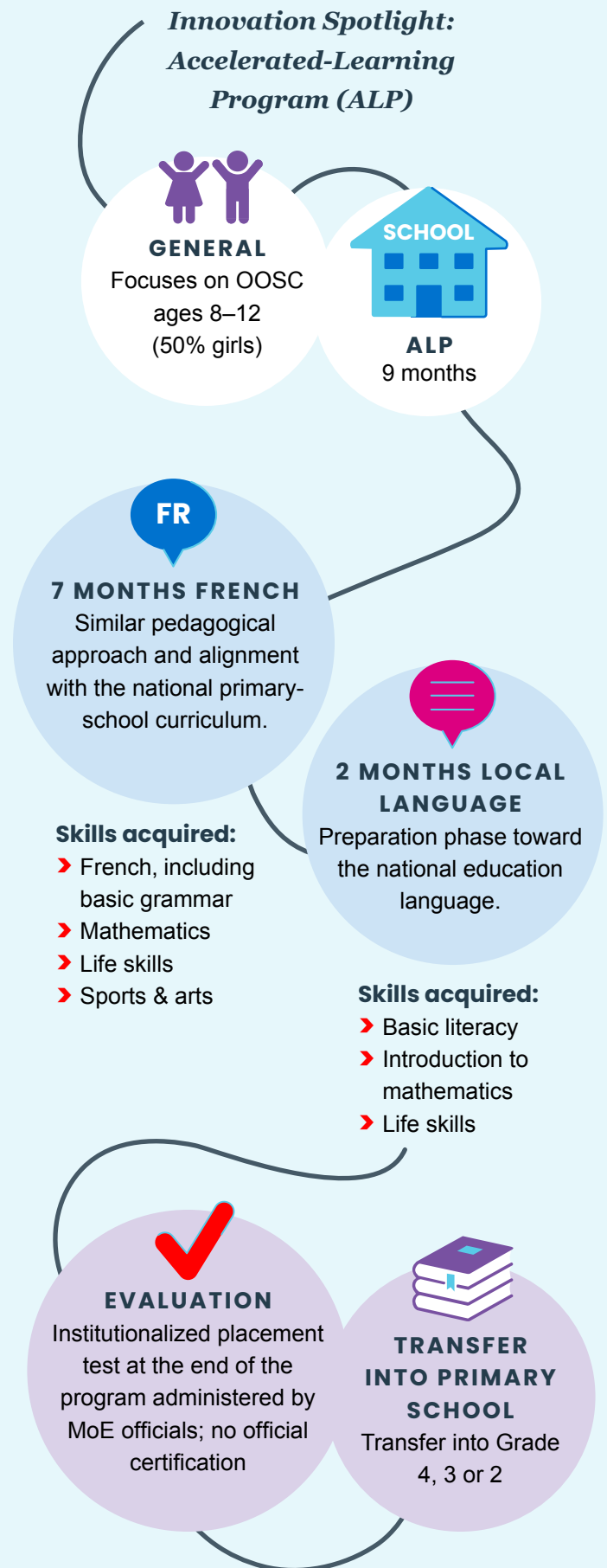
Empowerment was another central theme in these projects. Training sessions were conducted to help girls build life skills and strengthen their agency, covering topics such as leadership, children's rights and gender-based violence. Teachers and education officials were also trained in gender-responsive and crisis-responsive teaching practices. These efforts were complemented by the development of school safety and resilience plans, ensuring that girls could learn in environments that were both inclusive and secure.

Working to Ensure Education Opportunities in Formal and Non-Formal Settings

In tandem with addressing gender-related barriers, the projects worked extensively to expand educational opportunities in both formal and non-formal settings. Each project aimed to improve the quality and inclusivity of educational offerings and ensure the safety and protection of girls in educational settings. They collaborated with a wide network of schools and supported alternative education pathways to meet the needs of children in crisis-affected areas. These efforts were especially crucial in regions where formal schooling was disrupted by conflict or insecurity.

Non-formal education programs, including ALPs, were a cornerstone of this approach. For instance, the FASST project implemented accredited ALPs, known locally as “speed schools,” for children aged nine to 14, offering a condensed curriculum that enabled out-of-school children to enter or re-enter formal primary or secondary education. Similarly, the IMAGINE project’s ALPs allowed girls aged six to 18 to catch up on years of missed schooling in just nine months. ALPs in the EiC project focused on ensuring access to quality education for children and adolescents aged 10 to 19, targeting vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls and incorporating Qur’anic education to better align with the local context.

In areas where schools were closed due to insecurity, the projects introduced home-based learning. This innovative solution involved distributing radios with pre-recorded educational content, which children could access with the support of community facilitators.



The scope of support extended to infrastructure improvements as well. Projects rehabilitated classrooms, constructed temporary learning spaces and upgraded water and sanitation facilities, including latrines. These enhancements created more conducive learning environments, particularly for girls.

To further support quality education, the EiC project implemented the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program. This initiative tailored instruction to students' actual learning levels, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy skills. The results showed significant improvements in students' academic performance.

The reach of these efforts was substantial. The FASST project supported 135 public primary schools, 64 Franco-Arab schools and 302 accelerated-learning centres in Burkina Faso. The EiC project worked in 81 formal schools and 12 non-formal schools to ensure that vulnerable students had access to quality education. Meanwhile, the IMAGINE project supported 903 formal schools and 119 non-formal education initiatives in Mali. These projects also included capacity-building activities for teachers and educational administrators, equipping them with the skills needed to deliver inclusive and gender-responsive education.

By integrating formal and non-formal education strategies, these initiatives ensured that children—especially girls—had multiple pathways to access, and succeed in, education, regardless of their circumstances.

Innovation Spotlight: *Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)*

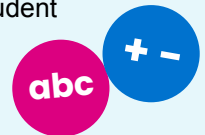
ASER ASSESSMENT

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a Moral Lesson Baseline for children in two categories:

- Literacy
- Numeracy

REQUIREMENTS CHECKLIST:

- Formal school and integrated Qur'anic education
- Primary 4 to Primary 6 class student
- Age range: 10–17
- 2 hours daily
- Sex: male & female



PLACEMENT



Placement is done in three groups for both literacy and numeracy based on performance at the ASER assessment.

NUMERACY: one-, two- and three-digit LEVELS LITERACY:

- Beginning level: Little to no knowledge of alphabets
- Word & para level: Little knowledge of words and fluency
- Story level: Little knowledge of comprehension



GROUP WORK

Interactive fun game is given to all children selected



INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Structured teaching to meet the needs of different groups



GRADUATION

Used as a means for advocacy and to encourage parents on sustainability while celebrating the children

Pélagie, age 11, holds a radio she received from the FASST project to help continue her studies from home. These radios broadcast lessons in science grammar and conjugation.



Note on COVID-19 Impact on Project Implementation

The COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on the implementation of the FASST, EiC and IMAGINE projects, including school closures, increased inflation and currency devaluation, with many families pushed into poverty and food insecurity. This necessitated various adaptations and adjustments, all of which enabled the projects to make significant achievements, maximize participation and ensure the continuity of educational and community-support programs.

FASST

To adjust to the impacts of COVID-19, the FASST project implemented a response plan from May to September 2020, which incorporated activities such as sensitization campaigns on prevention measures and the distribution of hygiene kits. These kits included washable sanitary towels, sanitary towel holders, underwear, a biodegradable plastic cover for storing biodegradable sanitary towels, soap and a cloth bag.



In addition, due to school closures and threats from armed groups that prohibited learning, the project created supervised listening groups in safe locations for displaced students—especially girls—so they could continue learning through a radio program. The continuity of education was also ensured through radio broadcasts by local radio stations in collaboration with the project.

IMAGINE

To adapt to the challenges brought on by COVID-19, the IMAGINE project made budgetary adjustments within the project and initiated preventive activities to keep children, especially girls, educated despite the impossible circumstances. The project also conducted sensitization campaigns on prevention measures and distributed hygiene kits.

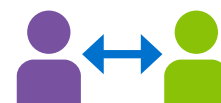
To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the project introduced solar-powered radio lessons and accelerated-learning programs so students could keep learning safely from home. It also improved school hygiene by installing water-access points and sanitation facilities and enforced safety measures like curfews and limited travel for staff and students.



EiC

The EiC project developed a six-month plan aligned with Nigeria's Education Sector COVID-19 Response Strategy. This plan involved extending the overall project duration and adjusting certain project activities.

The new project activities sought to improve the capacity of girls and communities to respond to the impact of COVID-19 through awareness campaigns via radio, the distribution of hygiene and cleaning supplies in schools and sensitization sessions for adolescents and parents to improve their knowledge on preventing COVID-19 and on its impact on girls. It also adapted programming to ensure safe participation through physical distancing, safe spaces and safeguarding protocols.



What We Achieved



EiC

Four girls that participated in the EiC project in Nigeria carrying dignity kits.



Despite significant challenges due to an evolving and complex security and public-health context, the **EiC project** made significant achievements. Results from the project highlight its comprehensive impact on education, child protection, gender equality and disability inclusion in northeast Nigeria. In total, the project directly benefited 163,187 learners, including 86,387 girls. Here is an overview of the key findings from the project:

01 EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINABILITY:

The cohesion of EiC interventions with the local government curriculum and education objectives in the Borno and Yobe states, along with regular, open communication, ensured no project duplication and allowed the project to deliver interventions that would not have been implemented by local governments or other organizations. This grassroots approach, combined with strong working relationships with local government officials, embedded sustainability at each stage of the program, fostering community ownership and wide-scale support for girls' education.

02 FORMATION OF COMMUNITY- AND SCHOOL-BASED CHILD-PROTECTION BODIES:

The project established Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) in 40 communities and School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) within the 93 schools. In 15 schools, protection and feedback mechanisms for students were implemented. These efforts raised awareness among families about child-protection risks and facilitated critical dialogues on barriers to education, child marriage and sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially for girls.

03 GIRLS' PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT:

Girls were actively involved in decision-making processes, influencing intervention planning and implementation. They identified suitable girl-friendly spaces, the contents of dignity kits, preferred protection mechanisms and improved accessibility of school facilities. This participation demonstrated their capabilities, encouraged them to reimagine their futures and motivated them to improve school attendance. Their participation also signalled the importance of including girls in such processes at household and community levels.

04 SHIFTING THE PERSPECTIVES OF BOYS AND MEN:

Interventions that focused on shifting the perspectives of boys and men led to widespread recognition and support for girls' rights, including education. These interventions reached over 5,000 boys and men. They became more aware of the importance of sharing chores, supporting girls' school attendance, refraining from child marriage and responding to puberty and menstruation needs. This resulted in stronger family relationships, increased household harmony and a reduction in gender-based violence.

05 ACCESSIBLE SCHOOL FACILITIES:

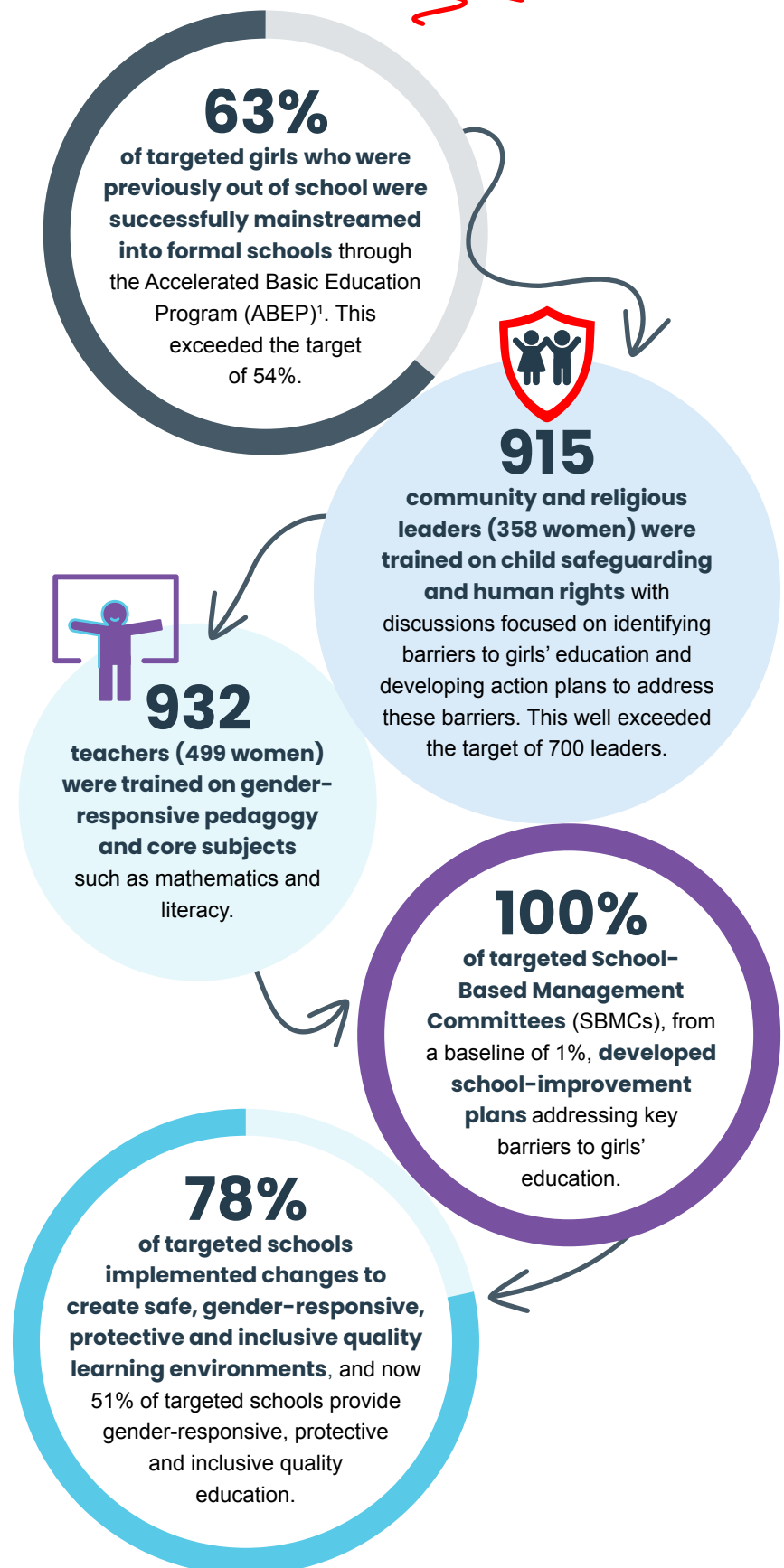
Approximately 21% of adolescent participants in the project were identified as having disabilities, with prevalent functional difficulties related to learning, memory, sight, concentration and making friends. The rehabilitation/new build of gender-responsive and accessible WASH facilities, classrooms and temporary learning spaces through the EiC project ensured that the most in-need schools now have girl-friendly, disability-accessible water and sanitation provision as well as improved classrooms and more learning spaces. This significantly improved student attendance while dismantling barriers to access for girls and students with disabilities. This also demonstrated that girls and boys, along with organizations for persons with disabilities, were consulted on construction needs and design.

06 IMPROVED ACCESS AND EDUCATION QUALITY:

The quality of education greatly improved thanks to the EiC project. As more girls enrolled in school, the project provided special training for teachers to help them teach better and be more responsive to students' needs. This training was refreshed regularly to ensure that teachers retained their knowledge and skills. Additionally, the program supported and trained school management committees and local government authorities to maintain high standards and accountability in schools. This comprehensive approach led to a significant enhancement in the overall education experience for students.

1. Accelerated-learning programs are now referred to as the Accelerated Basic Education Program (ABEP) by the Federal Government of Nigeria after the development of the new ABEP curriculum by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council in conjunction with Plan International.

Highlights of EiC Results





Children learning at a Speed School in Burkina Faso.

The **FASST project** faced quite a few hurdles during its implementation, including school closures and the suspension or relocation of learning activities due to the crisis in the country. Despite these obstacles, findings from FASST demonstrate the comprehensive impact of the project on enhancing girls' rights to complete safe and timely schooling in Burkina Faso. They also highlight the flexibility and adaptability of the project in line with the ever-changing context. This flexibility helped ensure that project activities remained relevant and effective and also helped avoid too many interruptions in the interventions. The project directly benefited 129,613 children aged six to 16, including 69,382 girls and 60,231 boys, surpassing its initial target of 68,408 children. Additionally, 6,797 intermediate beneficiaries (2,706 women and 4,091 men), such as community volunteers, traditional leaders and educators, were reached by the project's interventions. Here is an overview of the key findings from the project:

01 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES:

One of the most significant achievements of the FASST project was the completion of primary education by 9,274 girls, far exceeding the initial target of 7,653. This success highlights the project's effectiveness in promoting girls' education. Furthermore, 8,371 children, including 4,254 girls, were reintegrated into formal education through accelerated-learning programs. This reintegration was crucial to ensuring that children who had dropped out of school due to various challenges could continue their education.

02 EMPOWERMENT AND RESILIENCE:

The project also focused on empowering girls and their families. The percentage of girls asserting their right to education increased from 17% to 27%. While the percentage is still low, this improvement reflects the project's success in building confidence and resilience among girls in challenging contexts, enabling them to advocate for their educational rights. Despite the challenging context, the percentage of girls receiving tangible support for education remained stable at around 34%.

03 SAFE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Creating a safe and inclusive educational environment was another key focus of the FASST project. By the end of the project, the percentage of targeted schools and non-formal learning programs providing safe, protective and inclusive quality education had increased from 27% to 47%. This achievement is close to the project's target of 50% and demonstrates significant progress in improving the educational environment for girls.

04 ACCELERATED LEARNING:

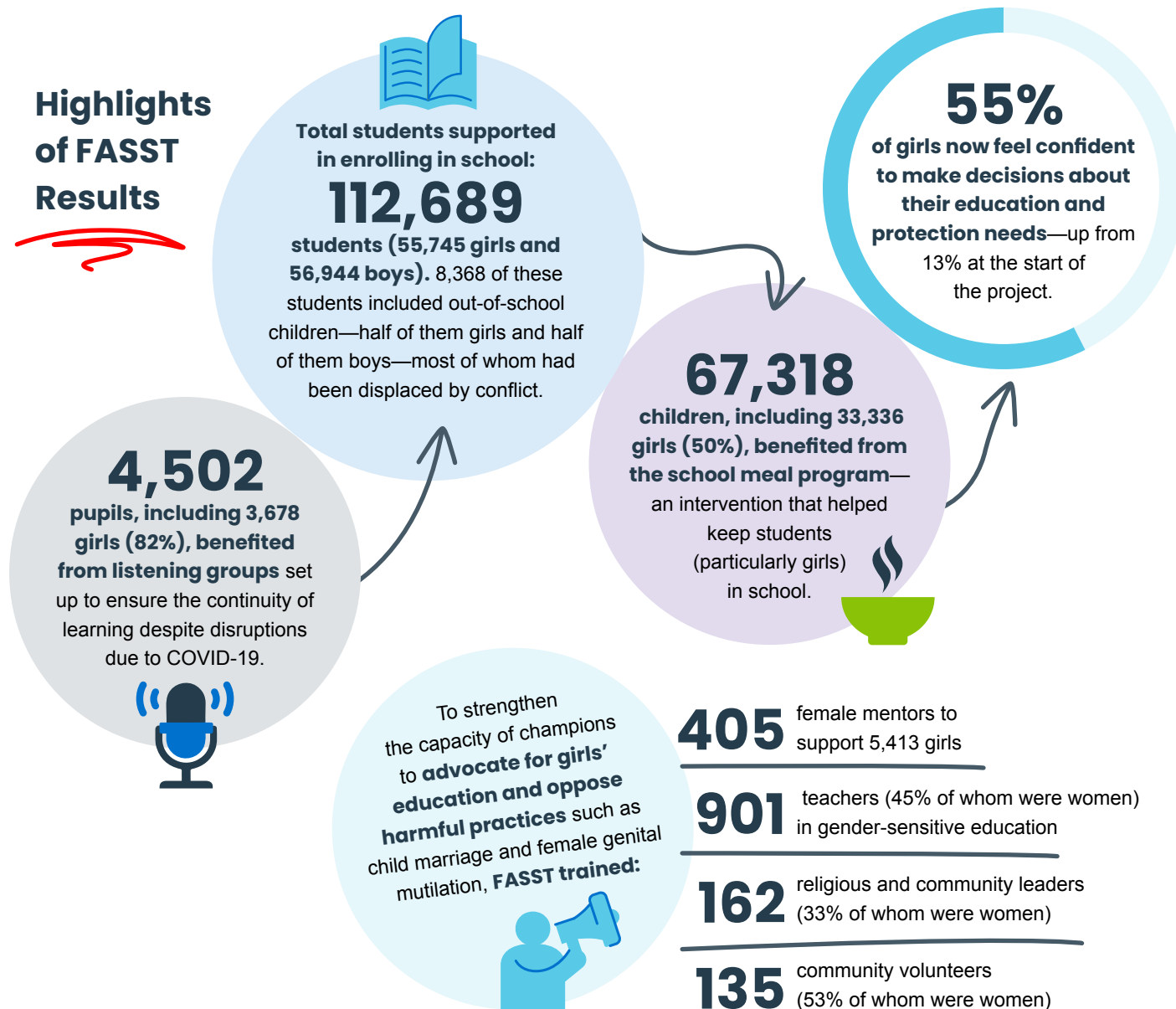
FASST's speed schools successfully brought 8,371 students (51% of whom were girls) back to classes in 302 centres, with 151 trained teachers (89 women and 62 men) supporting these students, 71% of whom had been displaced by conflict. The number of students who progressed to primary school far surpassed the original target of 6,101.

05 SCHOOL ENROLMENT:

The project supported a total of 112,689 students in enrolling in school, including 55,745 girls (49%) and 56,944 boys (51%). This support was distributed across various educational settings, including primary schools, Franco-Arab schools and accelerated-learning centres. The project also focused on supporting school enrolment for internally displaced persons (IDP), who were particularly vulnerable due to the ongoing conflict in the region. A total of 39,055 IDP students (19,214 girls and 19,841 boys) were supported.

- The majority of the students, 82,818 in total, were enrolled in primary schools. This included an equal number of girls and boys: 41,479 girls (50%) and 41,339 boys (50%).
- In Franco-Arab schools, the project supported the enrolment of 18,880 students. Among them, 8,661 were girls (46%) and 10,219 were boys (54%).
- The project also made a significant impact in enrolling 10,991 students in speed schools. This included 5,605 girls (51%) and 5,386 boys (49%).

Highlights of FASST Results



The **IMAGINE project** significantly improved education for girls in Mali, despite the challenges posed by ongoing conflict. This comprehensive initiative highlighted the importance of education in building a peaceful future and the resilience of communities in crisis-affected areas. Through this project, 124,764 girls and 128,251 boys were able to participate in formal and alternative education, against a target of 90,000 girls and 80,000 boys. The IMAGINE project is a testament to the resilience of girls in Mali and a powerful reminder that education is key to unlocking a peaceful and prosperous future. Here are the highlights of the findings from the project:



Girls participating in the IMAGINE project, completing a training on menstrual hygiene and how to make reusable sanitary pads.

IMAGINE

01 RETENTION AND PARTICIPATION:

The project made remarkable progress in retaining 57% of girls in formal schools and 88% of girls in non-formal education centres despite the ongoing conflict in Mali. This achievement is significant as it represents thousands of individual stories of resilience and hope.

02 CAREGIVER AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

In total, 1,324 members (including 776 women) of women's rights organizations were trained to champion gender equality and girls' education. Women's rights organizations in Mali helped increase family and community support for girls' education by creating safe, inclusive learning spaces and by training parents, teachers and community leaders to champion gender equality.

03 INNOVATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES:

In areas where schools were closed or destroyed, the IMAGINE project implemented creative solutions to ensure that children could continue learning. Solar-powered radios with pre-recorded materials were distributed for home learning around basic literacy and numeracy and facilitated by community members. Additionally, accelerated-learning programs helped 1,654 children (including 871 girls) catch up on years of missed schooling, with an 80% to 90% successful transfer rate back into the education system at the primary level. In addition, 40,969 adolescents participated in literacy camps, 20,904 of whom were girls—surpassing the original target of 20,311.



Innovation Spotlight: Literacy Camp

The literacy camps in the IMAGINE project were community-based learning spaces where girls—often in remote or conflict-affected areas—gathered to build foundational reading and writing skills. These camps were supported by trained community volunteers and used tools like solar-powered radios and USB-based audio lessons to deliver education in safe, accessible environments, ***helping 20,904 girls continue learning despite school closures.***

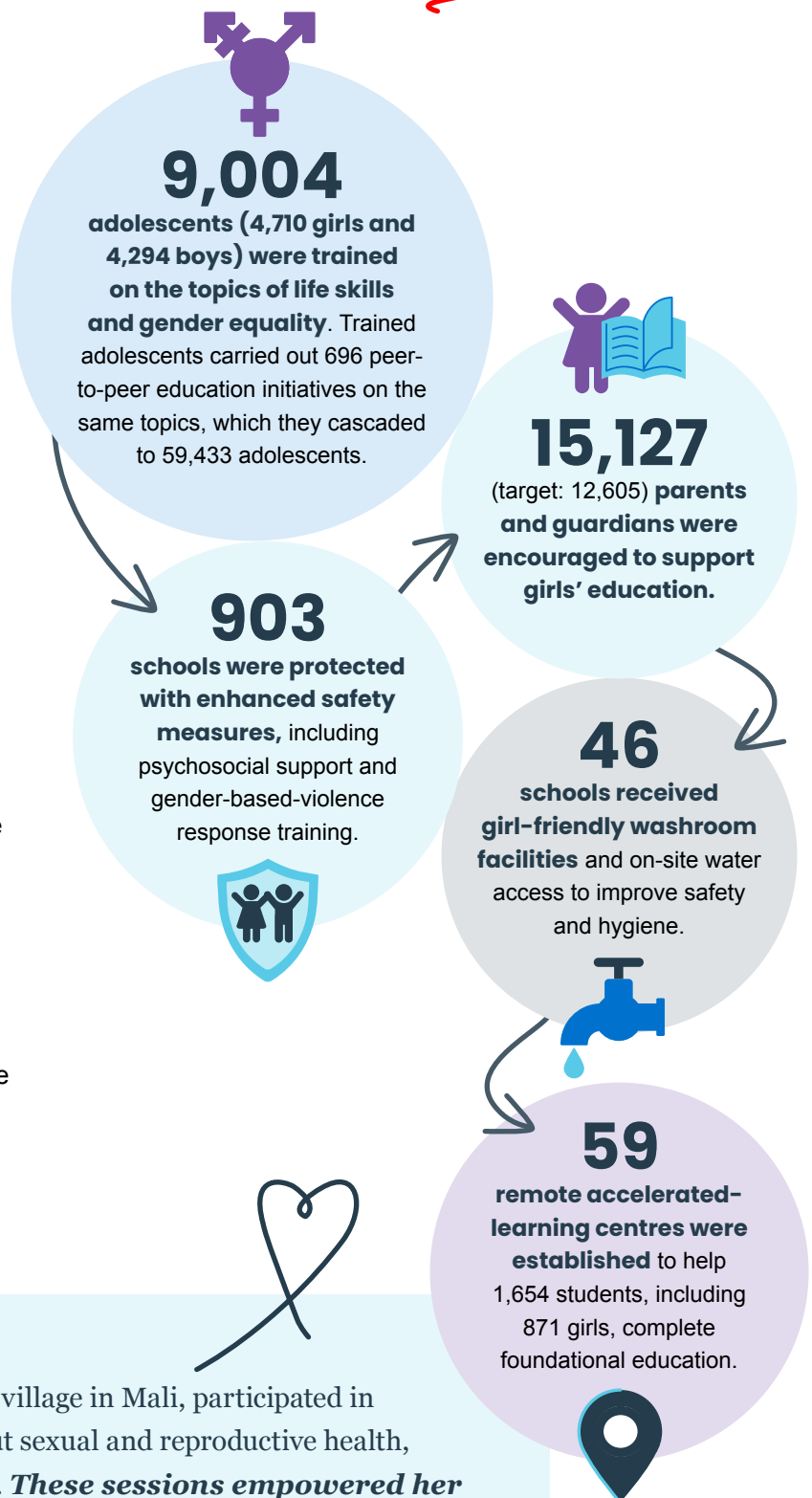
04 TEACHER AND COMMUNITY TRAINING:

The project focused on training educators and community members to support girls' education. 1,087 teachers (195 women and 892 men) were trained in implementing remedial classes, and 5,090 teachers (1,437 women and 3,653 men) were trained in teaching practices adapted to crisis-affected areas. Furthermore, 696 adolescent groups formed to cascade life-skills training to 59,433 adolescents (including 34,190 girls). Life-skills training is essential for adolescents as it empowers them with confidence, practical knowledge and health awareness while also promoting gender equality and conflict resolution. This holistic approach, involving families and communities, supports adolescents in making informed decisions and contributing positively to their society.

05 INFRASTRUCTURE AND SAFETY:

Ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment was a priority throughout the project, which led to the development of accessible, gender-responsive and sustainable washrooms at over half of the schools involved with the project (46 schools). Additionally, 903 school safety and resilience plans were developed working with 3,120 school leaders (862 women and 2,258 men) to address gender-based violence, sexuality education and crisis preparedness. These measures were crucial to creating safe spaces in which girls can learn and grow.

Highlights of IMAGINE Results



Story of Change

Alima, a 16-year-old girl from Bougoula, a village in Mali, participated in life-skills sessions, where she learned about sexual and reproductive health, including menstrual hygiene management. ***These sessions empowered her to communicate openly about her menstrual cycle both at school and at home,*** significantly improving her confidence and well-being.

Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

Invaluable lessons have emerged from the implementation of the IMAGINE, FASST and EiC projects. These projects have shown that with creativity, community involvement and integrated support, significant strides can be made in improving education and protection for girls in conflict-affected regions. Given the projects' similarities in programming approaches, many shared lessons emerged. This section illustrates the shared insights from across each project and highlights project-specific lessons and recommendations for future programming.

Shared Lessons

All three projects placed emphasis on the importance of flexibility and adaptability in crisis-affected settings, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing insecurity. In the face of adversity, they demonstrated the power of adjusting strategies to meet the ever-changing needs of their environments. All projects should adopt iterative approaches to adjust programming based on evolving contexts, ensure relevance and effectiveness.

All projects were guided by a gender-equality (GE) strategy that was contextualized and relevant to the project communities. The GE strategy was reviewed and adjusted annually to meet the changing needs of the projects. This ensured that each project was grounded and guided by strong GE principles and strategies throughout its life course. All projects were gender transformative, meaning they addressed the root causes of gender inequality, exclusion and power imbalances and promoted girls' agency while working with a variety of stakeholders.

Feedback mechanisms played a crucial role in all three projects. Effective channels such as face-to-face interactions, toll-free lines and trusted adults were preferred methods for collecting feedback on educational interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of these mechanisms—face-to-face meetings became difficult, making toll-free lines an invaluable tool for maintaining communication.

Child safeguarding was another priority across all projects. Orientation sessions for staff and community structures around child safeguarding and protection were essential to ensuring the safety of children. Regular awareness sessions on feedback mechanisms, safeguarding policies and the right to give feedback helped to reinforce these principles.

The importance of community engagement was a throughline across each project. The FASST project harnessed the power of local women, known as “godmothers,” along with community volunteers and traditional leaders, to foster a nurturing environment for girls' education. The EiC and IMAGINE projects also leaned heavily on community involvement, recognizing that local buy-in was crucial to the success and sustainability of their initiatives. Active involvement of community leaders, mentors and volunteers was essential for promoting gender equality and supporting girls' education.

Life skills and holistic education were integral to both IMAGINE and EiC. IMAGINE's life-skills training covered a broad spectrum, from children's rights to leadership, equipping girls with the knowledge and confidence to advocate for themselves. Additionally, involving students, teachers, caregivers, communities and local leaders in discussions about health and menstrual hygiene management helps reduce the taboos surrounding menstruation and promotes hygienic management. EiC's core life-skills curriculum was woven into various community-based learning activities, reinforcing key messages and skills.

Lessons and Recommendations from EiC

Girls' engagement

The project succeeded in providing meaningful opportunities to engage adolescent girls in key processes and decision making and in strengthening their agency, such as integrating girls as members of School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs). These committees play a critical role in maintaining high standards and accountability in schools. Through this membership, girls were given the opportunity to contribute to and shape the management and operation of schools. This was powerful in a context where girls' voices and opinions are not routinely solicited. This was primarily due to the engagement and support of community volunteers. Yet the recruitment of sufficient female community mobilizers was challenging in some communities—and it proved difficult to retain both female and male community mobilizers. This was because the training they received through EiC dramatically increased their knowledge and skill set and thus made it much easier for them to acquire paid employment.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** As community mobilizers were operating on a voluntary basis, payment of stipends in future program iterations may mitigate the high rate of attrition. Similarly, certificates or other professional recognition might also motivate community mobilizers to remain until the program ends.

Disability rights awareness and reasonable accommodation

Sensitizing communities to disability rights and providing training on disability inclusion improved community attitudes toward children with disabilities, addressed ableist norms and supported inclusive education. Providing accommodations like sign-language interpretation enables active participation in life-skills programming, improving self-esteem and access to leadership roles.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** In addition to taking a universal design approach, projects should set aside appropriate budgets (3% to 10% of activity budgets) for making reasonable accommodations for all project activities in the event that participants need support to be able to meaningfully participate. Projects should intentionally include representation of people with disabilities among project staff, decision makers and all participants involved (such as training facilitators, mentors and community leaders).



Teacher training

Teacher training was critical to improving the quality of learning. The continued support of teachers in the Teaching to the Right Level (TaRL) initiative positively impacted students' learning in numeracy and literacy. The training provided to teachers through the EiC project resulted in more harmonious classrooms and more supportive learning environments for students.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Some teachers were reluctant to move away from corporal punishment. Training on positive behavioural-management strategies alongside organized forums (within and between schools) where teachers can share best and creative practices would enable teachers to develop the confidence they need to fully leave negative disciplining techniques in the past.

Cash and voucher assistance (CVA)

Providing CVA to girls who are already enrolled in formal education encourages them to remain in school through transition periods. It's during these periods that girls are most at risk of dropping out.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** In future program iterations, CVA should be considered for non-formal learning and include out-of-school girls to help them overcome economic barriers to education.

Sustainability

The project worked with and through government structures at the state, district and community levels, which led to high levels of government ownership of activities and sustainability of effort beyond the life cycle of the project. The strengthening of community structures and community-based networks during implementation was critical to minimizing project disruption in certain locations where conflict hindered access for project staff.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** While the EiC project provided some incentives to support these structures and networks, future programming could improve the identification and provision (as well as budgeting) of relevant incentives for community structures and community-based networks to encourage continuous participation and commitment to participants' roles and responsibilities, a practice that is being followed by other INGOs and UN organizations. This could include monthly stipends for meeting refreshments or recharge cards as well as refresher trainings to continuously strengthen participants' capacity.

Lessons and Recommendations from FASST

Mentorship and community synergy

One of the key lessons learned was the significant impact of local coaching and mentoring by godmothers. This form of tutoring, which already existed in some communities, proved to be highly beneficial for girls. In addition, the collaboration between community actors such as godmothers, Village Child Committees (VCCs) and traditional leaders in awareness-raising activities strengthened community dynamics and fostered a commitment to safe, gender-sensitive, protective and inclusive quality education.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Consider scaling this mentorship approach by godmothers to a national level in order to improve the educational outcomes of girls. Continue fostering collaboration between community actors to strengthen community engagement and support for education.

Innovative educational approaches

Speed schools provide innovative solutions to help children continue their studies in conflict-affected areas. This model addressed the lack of educational opportunities for out-of-school adolescents by prioritizing girls and children with disabilities, reducing protection risks.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Support the development and accreditation of speed schools, build the capacity of teachers and strengthen the curriculum in order to improve the educational outcomes of out-of-school children and increase their chances of passing primary-school leaving examinations.

Nutritional and caregiver support

Improving school nutrition through canteens and support for transfer schools, accelerated-learning centres and Franco-Arab schools plays a vital role in keeping students, particularly girls, in school. This is especially important in regions facing food crises where caregivers struggle to provide daily meals, negatively impacting children's learning. Integrating support programs for parents under pressure was also essential due to the security crisis affecting the project's areas. This project also demonstrated that providing cash transfers for vulnerable girls helped to encourage caregiver commitment to girls' schooling, increasing the value of education for adolescent girls who face high school fees and restrictive social norms.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Maintain and strengthen school meal programs to ensure student attendance and support learning. Integrate parental-support programs to help parents manage stress and support their children's education.

Teacher development

Investing in the professional development of teachers on inclusive and gender-responsive pedagogy ensures equitable quality education. Reinforcing psychosocial support for teachers and children contributes to a safer and more protective educational environment.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Provide ongoing support for teachers' well-being and ensure continuous professional development.

Lessons and Recommendations from IMAGINE

Engaging local volunteers

Volunteering emerged as a cornerstone of the project, with most approaches being implemented at the community level by volunteers from the same community. This approach fostered a climate of trust between participants and religious and community leaders. The involvement of municipal, school, traditional and community authorities in mobilizing and raising awareness was instrumental in harmonizing the project's objectives with those of the government, ultimately meeting the needs and interests of the participants. The use of volunteers was also a cornerstone of the project's sustainability strategy, ensuring continuity at the local level to maintain and share new knowledge and skills acquired and follow through on community and school-level action plans.

Inclusive collaboration

The project's collaboration with women's organizations created a new platform for adolescent girls to discuss their educational needs with mentors in a safe environment. Inclusive collaboration is a significant step toward addressing gender-specific educational challenges.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Prioritize the identification and engagement of women's organizations from the initial phase to inform the design and adaptation of key strategies.

Education-sector engagement

The involvement of key government actors and community partners at local, regional and national levels ensured alignment with strategic policy priorities and allowed the project to target various educational needs. This also supported project delivery in a conflict setting by providing more localized and frequent opportunities for engagement as well as multiple information sources for daily security updates so that teams could adapt plans as needed to ensure the safety of staff and participants.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Complement existing sharing and networking platforms among key education actors with flexible communications platforms, such as Whatsapp and radio.

Flexible monitoring

Assessing the experience of girls' participation in project activities to ensure timely responses to social norms and power relations that might have emerged in these activities was identified as an area that requires improvement.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION:** Incorporate additional resources for monitoring more regularly and with greater depth to enhance the collection of qualitative data on girls' experiences in project activities.

The lessons learned and recommendations from the IMAGINE, FASST and EiC projects provide a roadmap for future initiatives aimed at empowering girls through education. These projects have shown that with creativity, community involvement and integrated support, significant strides can be made in improving girls' education and protection in conflict-affected regions.

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