



DOING MORE WITH LESS

Confronting COVID-19’s “Double Squeeze” on
Middle-Income Countries: Examples from Ecuador,
Lebanon, and the Philippines

An International Policy Ideas Challenge Brief, 2020-21

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Table of Contents

<i>List of Acronyms</i>	3
<i>Executive Summary</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Measuring Vulnerability: The Current State of the Crisis</i>	5
Five Indicators	6
Constructing the Index: Which Countries are Highly Vulnerable?	7
Country-Specific Drivers of Vulnerability	8
<i>Canada’s International Assistance</i>	8
Overview of Canada’s International Assistance	8
Canada in Ecuador	9
Canada in Lebanon	9
Canada in the Philippines	9
<i>Why and How Should Canadian Policy Adjust? Results from Expert Interviews</i>	10
Canada’s International Approach to COVID-19: General Observations	10
Ecuador	10
Social Aid	11
Economic Aid.....	11
Lebanon	12
Short Term Assistance.....	12
Long Term Assistance	13
The Philippines	13
Health	13
Economy.....	14
<i>Conclusion and Recommendations</i>	14
<i>References</i>	16

List of Acronyms

ADB – Asian Development Bank

CEP – Comité Ecuménico de Proyectos

CFLI – Canada Fund for Local Initiatives

CSO – Civil Society Organization

EMBRACE – Enhance Mother/Newborn/Child Health in Remote Areas through Health Care and Community Engagement

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

GAC – Global Affairs Canada

FEPP – Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progresio

FIAP – Feminist International Assistance Policy

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GPH – Government of Philippines

IA – International Assistance

MIC – Middle Income Country

NAS – Lebanon National Agriculture Strategy 2020-2025

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

ODA – Official Development Assistance

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SHE – Sexual Health and Empowerment

S&L – Saving and Loan

UN – United Nations

WEE – Women’s Economic Empowerment

Executive Summary¹

COVID-19 has imposed a ‘double squeeze’ on the Global South. Particularly, middle-income countries face a common challenge posed by collapsing demand for exported goods, high rates of unemployment, and political instability. Moreover, recipients of official development assistance are likely to get hit again by post-pandemic budget cuts in donor nations, as seen in the United Kingdom in 2020 (Citowicki, 2020). The social and humanitarian consequences of this squeeze are likely to be severe. Put simply, the need for foreign aid is drastically increasing just as the provision of that assistance is likely to be reduced. This brief seeks to describe the problem and suggest how Canada can best contribute to reducing the impact of COVID-19 on middle-income countries through international assistance.

We constructed a “vulnerability index” that identifies the countries that are at high risk of this double squeeze. Using this index, we selected Ecuador, Lebanon, and the Philippines for further study. As three vulnerable middle income countries, impacted in different ways by the crisis, they serve as typical case types from which general conclusions can be drawn. Ecuador, for example, is heavily dependent on natural resource markets. Lebanon suffers from a high COVID-19 infection rate and, with massive government debts, has limited fiscal capacity to address societal needs. The Philippines is heavily dependent on remittances, manufacturing, and tourism. Moreover, the crisis could negatively affect the fragile democratic institutions in each country.

Why should Canada have an interest in these countries and in the developing world more broadly? First and foremost, there is the need to contain and eradicate COVID-19 globally as soon as possible. Outbreaks abroad create and exacerbate outbreaks at home. Second, there is the question of global financial stability. Like viruses, an outbreak of defaults overseas can reduce demand for Canadian exports, especially for hydrocarbons, in addition to hurting Canadian foreign investment. Lastly, there are moral and humanitarian obligations. These apply to everyone, but are, of course, especially felt by Canada’s many diaspora communities, who retain social links to their countries of origin and families still abroad.

Having chosen these countries and made a preliminary identification of their strategic challenges, we reached out to dozens of experts, such as academics, subject-matter specialists, diplomats, and civil-society actors within the countries in question. The purpose of these interviews was to better understand the nature of the crisis and, more importantly, identify the tools at Global Affairs Canada’s disposal to address it. Our key recommendations include:

- Increasing the ratio of bilateral to multilateral international assistance spending.
- Decentralizing decision-making on aid distribution from Ottawa to embassy personnel.
- Committing to lengthier development projects that are resilient to changes in government.
- Retaining Canada’s commitment to the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and continuing to abide by the SDGs as outlined by the United Nations.

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Introduction

Writing in his capacity as the chief economics commentator for the *Financial Times*, Martin Wolf concluded in June 2020 that “managing [COVID-19] is only a part of the challenge now confronting emerging and developing countries. Many of them are highly vulnerable to global economic shocks. This one is of devastating proportions...many are likely to be forced into default.” According to Wolf, a quick V-shaped recovery is unlikely. Instead, he wrote, “the impact on their economies is unlikely to be brief. Many economies and billions of people are likely to be scarred.” (Wolf 2020).

Wolf’s analysis shows that managing the fallout of COVID-19 does not depend on access to vaccines alone. The medical approach needs to be complemented by an economic one, which aims to soften blows and avert a cascade of subsequent crises. To help meet this challenge, Canada must recalibrate its International Assistance (IA) programs and adjust for the post-COVID-19 world.

This brief is about how Canada should adjust. We seek to describe Canada’s present IA policies, identify the countries that are highly vulnerable from the virus’s economic fallout, and consider how Canada can best be of assistance. We offer country-specific recommendations and point towards some adjustments that GAC could make to improve the design and implementation of international assistance.

Our conclusions are the result of a two-stage research design. In the first stage, we sought to identify the countries that were highly vulnerable to COVID-19 and its associated economic fallout. Since the effects (and solutions) will vary by country, we examined a number of indicators. We then reviewed current Canadian international assistance policies that will need to be recalibrated in light of the changing situation.

In the second stage, we interviewed academics, policy experts, and country specialists working or living in the countries we identified as being highly vulnerable: Ecuador, Lebanon, and the Philippines. We asked a wide range of questions about where Canada can bring about the most change in the current environment.

The brief proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the state of the COVID-19 crisis and create an index of vulnerability using five indicators (rate of new deaths due to COVID-19, export dependency, remittances, aid dependency, and general gross debt as a percentage of GDP). We then briefly summarize the respective crisis conditions in our countries of interest. And in the last section, we make policy recommendations based on a synthesis of our analysis.

Measuring Vulnerability: The Current State of the Crisis

The World Bank estimates that the global economy shrunk by 4.3% in 2020, making COVID-19 the cause of the deepest global recession since 1945 (World Bank 2021). Specifically, regarding the developing world, the Bank reports that “the pandemic is likely to exert lasting damage to fundamental determinants of long-term growth prospects, further eroding living standards for years to come” (World Bank 2020b, xv, 5). In the section below, we examine five indicators of

vulnerability. From them, we built a composite index that identifies the countries at greatest risk from COVID-19.

Five Indicators

More severe outbreaks cause more severe losses, in both human and economic terms. Countries with larger outbreaks will be shut down for longer and will have to spend more to sustain and rebuild their societies. Restoring normalcy will be much more expensive. Accordingly, our first indicator was the rate of new deaths, averaged per week from the start of the first nationally recorded death, from COVID-19.

We secondly considered export dependency, with an eye to incorporating the specific industries most likely to be hurt by a global slowdown. Industrial metal exporters and oil-dependent economies are especially exposed, whereas agricultural markets have proved more resilient (World Bank 2020b, 22). Tourism is also a crucial export for many developing nations. The UN World Tourism Organization estimates that tourism has dropped by approximately 70 percent in 2020 (UNWTO 2020).

For our third and fourth indicators, we focused on remittances and aid dependency. Regarding aid, we project that many countries will seek to cut their aid budgets and indeed, some major donors, like the United Kingdom, already have (Citowicki 2020). As economies contract in donor countries, remittance outflow will be squeezed as well, hitting those countries most dependent on money sent home by migrant workers and diaspora populations.

Lastly, we considered a country's general gross debt (as a percentage of GDP), as a measure of its capacity to manage the economic fallout by launching aggressive fiscal and monetary policies. While we noted that most countries have forestalled worse near-term losses, there is a future risk of inflation and, more worryingly, sovereign debt crises (Kharas and Dooley 2020).

Table 1. Five indicators of vulnerability

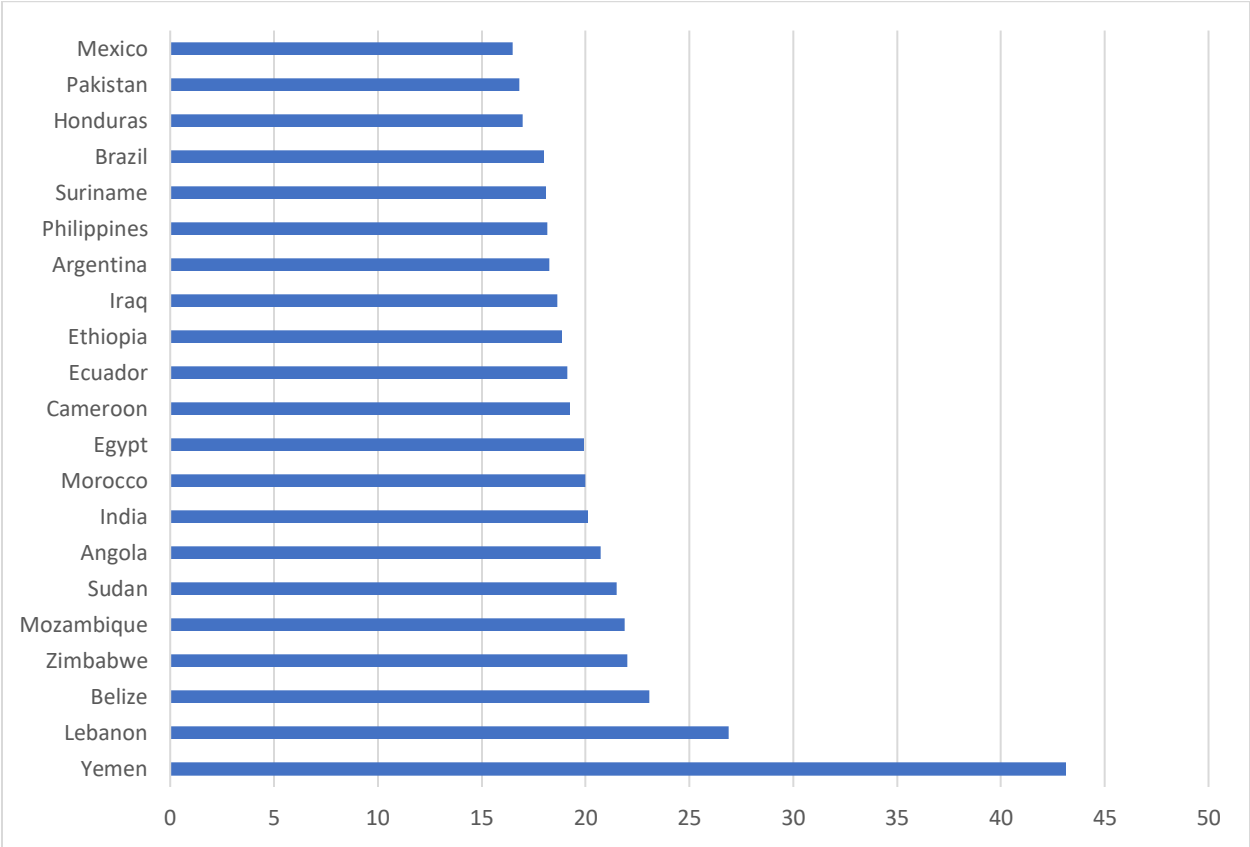
Indicator	Data
Outbreak severity	New deaths, averaged per week (2020)
Export dependency	Industrial metal, oil, and tourism exports as a percentage of GDP (2018)
Aid dependency	Aid as a percentage of GDP (2018)
Remittance dependency	Remittance as a percentage of GDP (2019)
Fiscal capacity	General gross debt as a percentage of GDP (2018)

Note: Data selected from most recent year available.

Constructing the Index: Which Countries are Highly Vulnerable?

We constructed a “vulnerability index”, which compiles the above indicators into a single value. To do this, we first transformed the data point for each country-indicator into a percentage of the largest country-indicator. This is a simple way to standardize the rankings of each country, for each indicator. We then averaged those standardized scores together to create a composite number. Vulnerability scores on the index can, theoretically, range between 0 and 100, where higher numbers indicate greater vulnerability. Incomplete data for certain countries, such as Libya and Syria, limited us from providing a full analysis. Nonetheless, the index still accounts for 59 ODA-eligible countries. The data within the index allows researchers to parse the overall score into its constituent data to see what is driving the vulnerability of any specific country.

Figure 1. Vulnerability Index



Through our research, we have chosen to focus on middle-income countries (MICs). Supporting the recovery of MICs through IA is consistent with Canada’s commitment to the SDGs, as inequality, poverty, and other key development challenges persist in many MICs (UNDESA 2014). MICs also represent about one third of global GDP and are major engines of growth. Canada has a direct interest in the renewal of global supply chains that rely on resources MICs possess, and the demand which these economies generate for Canada’s key sectors.

Given the above, we have focused on Ecuador, Lebanon, and the Philippines. These three middle-income countries were chosen because (1) they are vulnerable for different reasons; (2) they are struggling democracies with which Canada is already engaged; (3) they are geographically dispersed. For these reasons, they provide good insights for future Canadian aid development. The Philippines is heavily dependent on tourism and remittances. Ecuador suffered from a catastrophic initial outbreak of COVID-19, is dependent on natural resource markets, and has recently sought to increase its engagement with the international community. Lebanon is a worst-case scenario: heavily indebted, as well as reliant on tourism and remittances. Large Lebanese and Filipino diaspora communities also exist in Canada.

Country-Specific Drivers of Vulnerability

Ecuador's vulnerability was driven significantly by a high average weekly growth in COVID-19 deaths as of December 2020. In fact, the country remains one of the worst-hit globally by the virus (Cevallos-Valdiviezo, Vergara-Montesdeoca, and Zambrano-Zambrano 2020). Ecuador's economy is also somewhat reliant on its hydrocarbon exports—a sector spectacularly hit by a fall in price—which account for 9% of its GDP.

Lebanon is something of a perfect storm. Out of all ODA-eligible countries, Lebanon is the most indebted—owing around 169% of its GDP to lenders (Trading Economics 2019). Economically, the country is heavily dependent on foreign sources of income, including tourism exports (18% of Lebanon's GDP), remittances (14%), and foreign aid (3%). The country has suffered from 250,000 cases of COVID-19 and a death rate now appearing to be exponential (Our World in Data 2021). The country has been forced to enter multiple lockdowns. Lebanon's biggest challenge, however, is its capacity to govern—a problem internationally emphasised following the Beirut explosion in August, where improperly stored ammonium nitrate detonated, killing some 200 people and causing \$8.1 billion in damage.

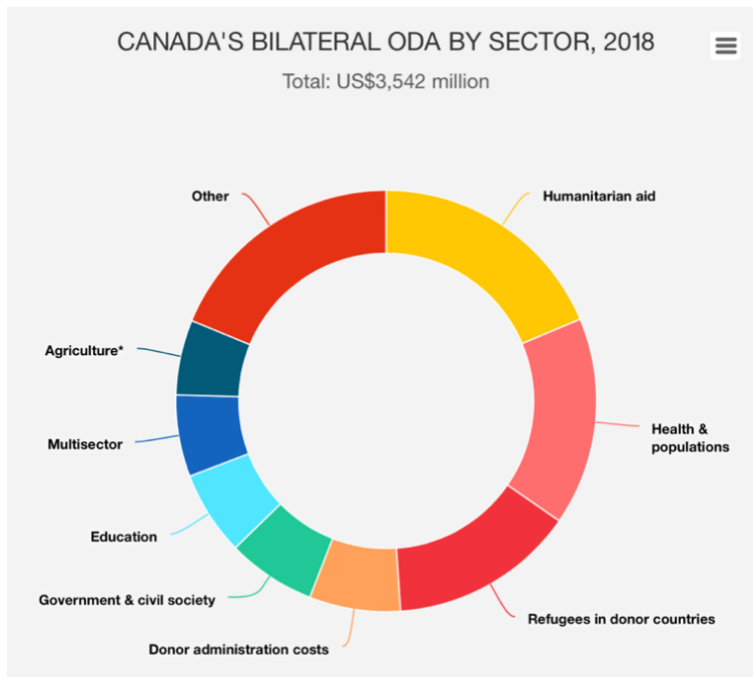
As in Lebanon, the Filipino tourism sector—which accounts for 25% of its GDP—was decimated in 2020, experiencing a loss of \$80 billion (USD). As of 2019, the sector employed 5.71 million people, about 13% of the total labour force (World Bank 2020a). By all estimates, it is clear that the damage will take a long time to heal, with international tourist receipts not expected to return to 2019 levels until at least 2024 (PwC 2020).

Canada's International Assistance

Overview of Canada's International Assistance

In 2019, Canada spent \$4.7 billion (USD, current) on ODA, which makes up almost all of Canada's IA. On average, 52% is sent or earmarked for multilateral organizations while the remaining 48% is bilateral (Donor Tracker 2020). Figure 2 depicts how Canadian bilateral ODA was distributed in 2018, the most recent year for which data is available. As a result of COVID-19, Canada committed \$740 million (CAD) in new and additional funding to ODA (DonorTracker 2020). Prime Minister Trudeau also committed \$1.1 billion (CAD) in support of a national medical research strategy to fight COVID-19 (PMO 2020).

Figure 2. Canadian Bilateral ODA, (most recent year available).



Source: Donortracker.org, OECD data. Gross disbursements (cash-flow), in 2018 prices. Includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and rural development.

Canada in Ecuador

Canadian relations with Ecuador have been relatively limited over the past decade. Most bilateral interactions have gone to small-scale human rights and gender equality initiatives. However, changing political dynamics in Quito, alongside the Venezuelan refugee crisis, has led to an improvement in relations. In 2019, Ecuador received funds as part of Canada’s \$6.2 million pledge to aid countries affected by the Venezuelan refugee crisis (Embassy of Canada to Ecuador 2019). According to our discussions with embassy staff, GAC is exploring possible future programming allocations to support its engagement in Ecuador.

Canada in Lebanon

Canada’s relationship with Lebanon has primarily been aimed at improving security and providing humanitarian and development assistance. \$1.4 billion over five years (2016-2021) to provide gender-responsive humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable conflict-affected populations in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan (Global Affairs Canada 2020). Following the Beirut explosion, Canada offered an additional \$30 million in humanitarian assistance.

Canada in the Philippines

Canada’s international assistance efforts in the Philippines primarily focus on tackling the severe inequality in the country. To this end, Canada has sought to provide an array of entrepreneurial support, focusing specifically on female entrepreneurs and agricultural landowners (Global Affairs Canada 2017).

Why and How Should Canadian Policy Adjust? Results from Expert Interviews²

We next sought to solicit the opinions of academics, researchers, and bureaucrats, on how Canada should respond to the challenges noted in the preceding sections. Our interview subjects included Canadian academics, regional university-based experts, Canadian personnel in local embassies in Quito, Beirut and Manila, and members of civil-society organizations.

Canada's International Approach to COVID-19: General Observations

Canada's response to COVID-19 needs to be fast, focused, and fair. A recurring theme expressed by many participants was that Canada's IA programme has garnered a reputation for inefficiently providing minimal aid to many countries instead of focused aid to a few.

From a macro perspective, we were told that the Canadian government should engage in longer and more durable bilateral commitments. A common problem expressed by multiple interviewees was that IA often falls to the whims of the current governing party. By committing Canada to longer bilateral agreements – as opposed to multilateral ones, which, with distributed responsibility, are easier to renege on – the likelihood of a change in policy from one government to the next is reduced considerably.

Somewhat linked to the malleability of Canadian aid is the issue of “faddism”. One development expert accused Canada of “hopping on the bandwagon” by rapidly altering its priorities and failing to see through some of its commitments. One participant encouraged that Canada “double-down” on its pledge to uphold the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as a “check” against such sudden shifts. To achieve its full potential, Canada should invest in activities and capabilities where it has a comparative advantage. One such focus area is the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). Canada's work in this regard was almost unanimously supported by those interviewed. With women facing dwindling employment opportunities and collapsing informal markets (where they are overrepresented) (World Bank 2020b, 36), Canada should continue to focus on this initiative. It was also suggested that Canada decentralize decision-making and enhance partnerships with trusted NGOs – especially those who are locally based.

Ecuador

In addition to the indicators of vulnerability we examined in the first phase of research, our interview subjects emphasised a few risks specific to Ecuador:

- Immense poverty that exists in many of the rural provinces, especially those inhabited by indigenous populations
- Unequal or unavailable health and educational services

² The findings in this section derive from 15 expert interviews held via Zoom between September and January 2020. The experts interviewed include academics, NGO and CSO policy workers, public servants, and Canadian embassy personnel. For purposes of confidentiality, the interviews were not recorded and the participants names are not disclosed.

- Large scale child labor and prostitution
- A volatile refugee crisis stemming from Venezuela
- Political corruption and instability

Social Aid

Our interviews underscored the need for a focused IA plan. Several experts indicated that Canada should shift away from its traditional strategy of assisting the local population through multilateral fora. Instead, it was suggested that GAC establish bilateral relationships with local civil society organizations whom the embassy is able to identify as best able to handle the ongoing crisis. Bilateral contributions accrue greater reputational benefits and leverage than aid dispersed through an international organization.

Although many credible organizations exist, recommendations were made to work with organizations that are capable of implementing large initiatives and that have made considerable strides in assisting the local populations in the area of health, education, and agricultural development. Circumventing governmental ministries and allocating direct IA to local CSOs would, we were told, be a more efficient use of resources.

In the long-term, Canada should build diplomatic or “soft power” with the Ecuadorian government around issues such as human rights, climate change, and the protection of children and indigenous populations. Many girls, especially refugees from Colombia and Venezuela, are being forced into hard labor and prostitution (US Department of State 2019). Canada should work with its international partners and Canadian mining companies in the area to advocate with the local government to end such practices.

Economic Aid

An example of a program that might be expanded is the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). By offering small grants to locals, the CFLI has provided assistance for Ecuadorians in areas such as LGBTQ2+ rights, economic development and assistance for women, healthcare and education. As one expert explained, the CFLI is a “double whammy” because funding is quick to be processed and highly effective.

Saving and loan (S&L) cooperatives are another effective tool for supporting the local economy. Reportedly successful in Colombia, we suggest GAC consider replicating and expanding these cooperatives in Ecuador. In addition to empowering local entrepreneurs, S&L cooperatives are also advantageous from a Canadian point of view as local embassies – which have informational advantages such as knowledge of local stakeholders and businesses, and the ability to quickly adapt – can decide which projects to prioritize.

Lastly, GAC should work to expand private-public sector cooperation. One successful example of this was Canada’s support for Ecuador’s admission to the Global Concession Financing Committee, which expanded its access to international financing. In this regard, it was suggested GAC work closely with some of the largest Canadian companies operating in Ecuador to develop local skills, provide private financing for small business owners, and support educational

initiatives in fields such as agriculture and technical assistance. Such a policy would not only improve the living standards of rural Ecuadorians, but it would expand markets and provide stability, making the country more attractive for future investment.

Lebanon

As noted, Lebanon is in dire straits. Effective government barely exists, the state is battling severe poverty, corruption, and inequality, while the education and healthcare systems have diminished in quality. Furthermore, the banking sector is in crisis, overseas remittances have not reached their intended destinations, more than one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon are in desperate need of assistance, and the country is \$90 billion in debt as of late 2020. One expert described COVID-19 as the “drop of water that makes the bucket overflow.” Experts recommended that Canada needs to adopt both a short- and long-term plan for helping Lebanon.

Short Term Assistance

Health Care

The cumulative effect of the 2020 Beirut explosion and the pandemic have brought Lebanon’s healthcare system to a point of near collapse. Canada should assist the Lebanese government, in tandem with the international community and local CSOs, in repairing and rebuilding the healthcare network. One expert told us that unconditional direct aid may be misappropriated, and conditional aid likely to be rejected by government officials. As a short-term solution, it was suggested that Canada instead either donate or buy specific materials (i.e., CT scanners, X-ray imaging machines, PPE, etc.) to help compensate for the existing shortages.

Education

Lebanon has long relied on its strong education system to propel the local economy and the welfare of its diaspora, who in turn, reinvest through remittances. However, one expert warned that if the education system collapses, this feedback loop could be irreparably disrupted. In the near term, Canada should work closely with NGOs and CSOs to educate the country’s most vulnerable students. According to one expert, *Right to Play* and *Digital Opportunity Trust* are two locally based organizations that are worthy of partnership. The former focuses on providing assistance through education, gender equality initiatives, and child protection, whereas the latter specializes in technological entrepreneurship and leadership training programs.

Economy

The collapsing Lebanese economy will only continue to worsen as a consequence of the pandemic. Two fundamental areas are in need of reform, upon which a new foundation can be built.

1. Technology and Infrastructure

If the education system is restored, Lebanon will continue to produce highly skilled technologists. The problem, however, is that the country does not have the infrastructure to support these kinds of positions. Canada should send experts and partner with local organizations in building Lebanon's digital infrastructure. This same idea should also be applied to larger infrastructure projects, such as repaving the roads, reinstating the transnational railway system, and so on.

2. Agriculture

The relationship between IA and agriculture in Lebanon is complex. Although Lebanon relies on IA to make up for food shortages, the current provision of food has severely undercut the business of local agriculture workers. With few exports and now a reduction in domestic sales, many Lebanese farmers, particularly those in the South, face an existential crisis. For these reasons, we suggest Canada work with the Lebanese government in executing the Lebanon National Agriculture Strategy (NAS) 2020-2025. Canada could help to identify best practices, supply necessary equipment, and develop a strategy for bringing goods to market, both regionally and internationally.

Long Term Assistance

Canada's long-term strategy in Lebanon should focus on political change. As one expert told us, "Lebanon is the cork that keeps the Middle East from exploding." It is recommended that Canada, as part of a larger global coalition, assist Lebanon in protecting the rule of law and tackling corruption. Working with local domestic organizations, lobby groups like the Association of Banks of Lebanon, and student governments, Canada can encourage an agenda of transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, it was recommended by experts that Canada should commit to longer IA projects (15-30 years) and increase its overall mission budget. In doing so, Canadian policy would be resilient to changes in government and Canada would be able to employ more personnel to work on development and community outreach.

The Philippines

Despite strong economic growth over the past twenty years, the Philippines remains plagued by endemic inequality, poverty, natural disasters, and political instability. As in Ecuador and Lebanon, the pandemic has worsened these challenges. Below we focus on how Canada can assist with healthcare and economic reforms.

Health

Women and girls have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis in the Philippines. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the current crisis could lead to a 26 per cent increase, or 3,170 maternal deaths per year, over 750,000 unintended pregnancies, and an increase

in online sexual exploitation cases (UNFPA 2020). Canada could help mitigate this fallout by committing to the following:

- *Tackle the challenges of maternal mortality, unplanned pregnancies, and online sexual exploitation and abuse.* In this regard, bilateral aid – targeted directly at local CSOs – will likely play a dramatic role in alleviating some of the current stresses on the health care system.
- *Increase funding and personnel for the Enhance Mother, Newborn, Child Health in Remote Areas through Health Care and Community Engagement (EMBRACE) and Sexual Health and Empowerment (SHE) projects that are currently underway.* Both initiatives fall perfectly in line with Canada’s FIAP. And while each project has received extra funding in light of the pandemic, we believe that more will be needed.
- *Assist with educational continuity and digital development.* The need for telehealth systems, satellite/mobile clinics, and case detection (both COVID-19 and others) and treatment apps have already increased drastically, and demand is only expected to rise in the years to come. Canada can leverage its capabilities by sending specialists to the Philippines to work with the local government and communities in developing capacity and infrastructure. This will directly assist the local population in online educational learning, along with the continued protection of women and girls.

Economy

According to a 2020 Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, the Philippines’ economy is projected to shrink by 7.3%, making it among the hardest hit in Southeast Asia (Asian Development Bank 2020). Canada can help mitigate the damage by renewing two ongoing GAC projects that are scheduled to end in the coming year: 1) the Philippine Commission on Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) project; and 2) the JobStart Program.

WEE is particularly promising given its commitment to coordinate with government agencies (i.e., Philippines Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade, and Department of Industry), and private sector partners on responses and activities to support women. They could be instrumental in supporting women during the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards.

GAC’s JobStart Program, on the other hand, aims to support the nationwide rollout of the JobStart Philippines Program of the Department of Labor and Employment, which is implemented by the ADB. This project is designed to assist at-risk youth become “job-ready” for full time employment. With funding set to expire in 2022, Canada should renew this crucial program in a time when it is needed the most.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the full ramifications of COVID-19 will only be understood many years from now, this brief has sought to clarify how Canada can best contribute to pre-empt and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on Ecuador, Lebanon, and the Philippines through international assistance.

In trying to understand this question, we asked ourselves: what aspects of this crisis will drive or set off macroeconomic instability? Which countries will COVID-19 render the most vulnerable? And how can Canada work to diminish this risk, further our interests, and better global welfare?

Our two-stage research design offers a starting point for tackling some of these questions. By identifying the highest tier of vulnerable middle-income countries in the world and then speaking with experts about how best to mitigate these ongoing challenges, we have arrived at a number of country-specific recommendations. We have included these in the sections above, but, from them, we can distil several general recommendations that apply more broadly to Canada's development policy – all while keeping in mind GAC's areas of priority. In short, we encourage GAC to consider the following policies:

- Increasing the ratio of bilateral to multilateral international assistance spending.
- Decentralizing decision-making on aid distribution from Ottawa to embassy personnel.
- Committing to lengthier development projects that are resilient to changes in government.
- Retaining Canada's commitment to FIAP and continuing to work towards achieving the SDGs as outlined by the United Nations.

By adopting these recommendations, streamlining decision-making, and thinking long-term, Canada will stand to make a real difference – in a time when it could not be more needed.

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