The government estimates that the earthquake destroyed or severely damaged 80 percent of schools west of Port-au-Prince and 35 percent to 40 percent of schools in southeastern Haiti. Beyond the destruction done to buildings, the recent earthquake has increased threats to the psychological and physical health and safety of 85 percent of Haiti’s 3.4 million children. Evidence from similar situations points to education as the best way to ensure the physical and psychological needs of children.

Healing Classrooms: Putting Teachers and Students on the Road to Recovery

About the model: Healing Classrooms is a specialized approach to educating children in emergency situations. Developed over 27 years in conflict-affected countries, Healing Classrooms is a tested model that jump-starts the healing process by providing children immediate access to educational activities with teachers that are trained to address their psychological needs. The Healing Classrooms approach has been incorporated into most of the International Rescue Committee’s (IRC) educational programs in countries including Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Liberia.

Nonprofit agent: Founded in the 1930s to address the needs of Jewish refugees, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) shifted after World War II to focus on providing post-emergency relief in conflict zones and areas affected by natural disasters. The IRC has been a leader in emergency response for more than 75 years. Its field teams have been key first responders to conflicts, such as the civil wars in Angola and Afghanistan, and natural disasters, like the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 2005 earthquake in northern Pakistan. Its field teams of experts, organized along key sectors (e.g., health, water and sanitation, protection of children, women and other vulnerable groups, shelter, and education), bring extensive experience and skill to working with people going through extreme trauma. IRC has special expertise in working with conflict-affected children and youth. The organization has long been at the forefront of developing culturally relevant approaches to supporting children’s psychological, social, and physical well-being. Currently, IRC supports education programs for refugee and war-affected children, youth, and adults in 22 countries.
**MODEL IN PRACTICE 2 (CONTINUED):**

**Impact:** Assessing the impact of efforts to meet the immediate needs of communities after a disaster is inherently tricky. The nature of an emergency is that it defies comparison and the chaos of these situations makes it difficult to collect data. Nonetheless, if you seek to address the physical safety, educational, and psychosocial needs of children immediately after a disaster, three indicators matter: 1) access to safe, child-friendly spaces, 2) children’s participation in learning activities, and 3) availability of teachers who are trained to address the needs of students affected by conflict.

While it is far too early to report results in Haiti, results from other Healing Classrooms initiatives provide evidence of the model’s promise. The following examples from Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Liberia illustrate the impact of the Healing Classrooms approach:

- **Chechnya, Russia (2000, supporting people displaced by Russian / Chechnyan conflict):** Study findings by an external researcher showed that simply providing a safe space for children in an emergency situation helped restore a sense of normalcy and jump-started the psychological healing process.24

- **Afghanistan (2004, post-Taliban reconstruction and recovery):** An independent study using interviews, surveys, and classroom observations found that after teacher training in the Healing Classrooms program, teachers improved and broadened their teaching techniques and were able to help students gain valuable life skills in other areas such as health.25

- **Liberia (2006, post-conflict reconstruction):** An independent study highlighted the ripple effect of the program’s teacher training: 44% of the trained teachers in the program reported helping other teachers with lesson planning, a quarter of the trained teachers were offering mini-workshops and tutoring to their colleagues, and 20% reported helping peers with classroom management skills and strategies.26

IRC has also been engaged in two ongoing, longitudinal research projects in conjunction with the Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research. The first research project, launched in 1999, involves a study of the impact of IRC’s non-formal education program on internally displaced Chechen children and adolescents residing in Ingushetia, Russia. The second project, launched simultaneously with a new IRC emergency education program in July 2001, examines the impact of emergency education on the psychosocial adjustment of Kunama children and youth living as refugees in Ethiopia. We anticipate these studies will provide important insights regarding the model’s impact.
**Model in Practice 2 (Continued):**

**Table 3: Cost and Outcomes of Home-Based Schools in Afghanistan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IRC’s home-based schools in Afghanistan</th>
<th>Government schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent cost per student</td>
<td>$18</td>
<td>$31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion rate (through 5th grade)</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per graduate</td>
<td>$132</td>
<td>$495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per learning outcome (passed end-of-year exam)</td>
<td>$134</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Costs:** As of this writing (June 2010), cost estimates for implementation of the complete Healing Classrooms model in Haiti are not yet available. We do know that costs for such programs can vary widely from country to country and depend on many factors, including the availability of in-country staff, the availability of materials for classroom construction, and the capacity of local governments to provide materials and pay teachers.

IRC’s current focus in Haiti is setting up child-friendly spaces that provide 15,000 children with a place to engage in recreational and non-formal education activities. Based on these current plans, IRC estimates costs for setting up such child-friendly spaces are approximately $75 per student/year. Transitioning them into more formal learning spaces over the next several months will require resources for initial setup as well as teacher training, materials for students and teachers, and activities to increase the capacity of the relevant education authorities.

Operating costs differ in every country based on variables such as intensity of teacher training needed and amount of government support available. However, cost figures from Afghanistan provide a general benchmark of program costs for the approach. Home-based schools established during the Taliban years incorporated the Healing Classrooms approach and provided children with educational opportunities that were both safe and protective. For the program in Afghanistan, recurrent costs were $18 per student/year. This included teacher training that focused on the Healing Classrooms approach as well as materials and supervision. Additional costs included startup investments (totaling about $38,000) to address such areas as school rehabilitation, furnishing schools, and intensive training of teachers who have never taught before. IRC’s analysis found that home-based schools using the Healing Classrooms approach were quite cost-effective compared with government schools as seen in Table 2 below.

Our team will continue to work with IRC and others to gain additional insight into the impact and cost-effectiveness of this model in Haiti. As new cost information is available, we will post updated profiles on our website: [http://www.impact.upenn.edu](http://www.impact.upenn.edu).

**Nonprofit Contact:** Sarah Smith, director of the Child and Youth Protection and Development (CYPD) Technical Unit at IRC: [sarah.smith@theirc.org](mailto:sarah.smith@theirc.org), or visit IRC’s website: [http://www.theirc.org](http://www.theirc.org).