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INDONESIA

CASE STUDY

Pilot Project Strengthens Education

Education initiative raises student scores in three subjects



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

Two students attending Madrasa Ibtidayah Bustanul Ulum in the East Java city of Batu, benefit from the new emphasis on developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Children are being encouraged to be creative and to challenge themselves. They are allowed to express themselves and explore their own thoughts and ideas.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
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Challenge

It is not uncommon for Indonesian schoolchildren to spend hours upon hours simply listening to teachers or watching others work on the blackboard — teaching methods that did not strive to challenge or inspire them. At least 30 percent of teachers in Indonesia have not been trained to the required standard, and public funding to pay teachers has been minimal. Desks were in the past bolted down to classroom floors, libraries were rarely used, and some books were even locked up. Elementary school teachers, at the bottom rung of a hierarchical educational system, were too afraid to make changes without a superior's consent. In addition, a recent shift of authority from the central to local government handed management of systems to local education offices that were ill-prepared to develop innovative programs.

Initiative

USAID supported a basic education pilot program in May 2003, which now reaches 402 schools in 20 districts of Central and East Java. The project's goal was to improve the quality of primary education in public schools. The program has built management models for school administrators and trained local governments in how to use those models. In addition, USAID has helped officials develop teacher training programs as well as methods for encouraging communities and parents to participate actively in their children's schooling and education.

Results

Students in target schools have performed better after the program in the key subjects of reading, math, and science. Final exam scores for sixth graders have improved in many schools that participated. Parents and communities have become more involved in their children's education, forming parents groups, putting up display boards, making teaching aids, and following up on absentee children. School budgets are on open display in most schools and many have increased funding for operations and maintenance. Teachers say they are pleased with their training, which emphasizes creativity and cooperative learning. Parents are finding that the children's work is increasingly the product of their own thinking and written in their own words. The results, like the students, now speak for themselves.