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PAKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Schools Reopen after Earthquake

Nearly 230 tent classrooms receive new books and desks



Photo: USAID/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Second-graders in Pak Gali Boys School in Poonch District were some of the first students to use new tent classrooms provided by USAID after the devastating October 2005 earthquake. Outfitted with desks and chairs, the classrooms helped schoolchildren reestablish normal routines after the quake.

“I love that we have chairs and desks. Before this, we studied on the floor,” said Noman Hud, an eighth-grader at Pak Gali Boys School.

Telling Our Story
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Schools were among the worst-hit structures when a major earthquake shook northern Pakistan in October 2005. As classrooms crumbled, the damage stretched beyond the loss of infrastructure and tens of thousands of lives. Students remained traumatized when schools reopened, often unable to stay indoors or to focus on their work. Some had no classrooms to go back to, others studied in rooms with cracked walls, and still others crowded into a few standing rooms or attended classes in the open air. They often sat on the floor because desks and chairs were buried under the rubble, as were their books.

To restore safe classroom space and help students return to a normal routine while schools were rebuilt, USAID paid local villagers in six districts in the northeastern province of Azad Kashmir to clear rubble from school sites, provided tents as temporary classroom space to 228 schools, and bought new books, bags, desks, and chairs for more than 36,000 students. USAID selected the school sites with the help of education officials, and a management committee was elected in each school so communities could weigh in on decisions. Village residents cleared rubble and erected school tents, earning about \$3 each day, which helped revive the local economy.

School officials said these changes provided far more than much-needed classroom space and supplies — they also boosted the confidence of children haunted by fears of another disaster. Students had been scared of sitting in damaged classrooms, said Muzaffar Husain, headmaster of the Pak Gali Boys High School in Poonch District, one of the first schools to use the new tents. “Children focus better when they perceive no threat to their world,” Husain said. “They now see safe structures, desks and furniture. They have begun to complete their homework again and to come to school on time.” Eighth-grader Noman Hud said he liked the new tents at Pak Gali: “There’s no danger here. We can study in peace.”

“This is a very good program,” says Shaukat Hasan, the father of three Pak Gali students. “Our school routine is getting back to normal.” With help from USAID and their communities, children in areas devastated by the earthquake are returning to school with a renewed appreciation for learning.