This project has analyzed a successful school program that provides Palestinian children with a quality education in selected countries of the Middle East. It also developed a tool for documenting administrative, classroom, and compensatory practices and applied selected assessment tools that can be used in conflict zones around the world.

Rationale

The schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in the Near East have been remarkably successful in educating Palestinian students, in spite of challenges and difficulties. Students at UNRWA schools often score higher on state exams than students in the government-run schools of the host country. Understanding the success of UNRWA schools would be valuable to countries in the region and organizations managing schools for displaced and refugee populations in other countries across the globe.

Response

To understand how the UNRWA school system operates so efficiently under difficult circumstances, RSR funded research on its students’ academic achievement. Data from students was compared to students elsewhere, using the World Bank’s System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results (SABER), a systematic process designed to examine education systems. The collected data included the results of international assessments, such as the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Association of
the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS), as well as national assessments and exams, such as Jordan’s National Assessment of Knowledge Economy Skills.

In analyzing the data, researchers constructed an econometric model that treats learning achievement as a function of student, family, school, and institutional factors. Statistical techniques were applied to overcome the identification and self-selection biases inherent in such analyses. Results for UNRWA schools were compared with those of public, as well as private (non-government, alternative) schools.

To add to the quantitative data, field workers collected qualitative data on administrative, classroom, and compensatory practices. They used focus groups, surveys, and interviews of school administrators, staff, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders in UNRWA school communities.

The analysis will be used to create a checklist of important factors in delivering quality schooling during crises and other difficult circumstances. The project will disseminate its findings in a report for the benefit of other countries, and for further improvement of the UNRWA schools. The report will be used by the UNRWA Institute of Education, which was participant in the study, as well as other teacher training programs, to improve the quality of teaching in the region.

As a secondary benefit, the project has led to the institutionalized use of classroom observations in Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, in the West Bank and Gaza, researchers are working with local officials to implement a survey of school directors. They have also trained government and UNRWA officials in the use of a standard classroom observation tool; the government in the West Bank will start using this method for monitoring educational practice in the classroom.

**Accomplishments to Date**

- Compared achievement of UNRWA students to students in other schools and regions, and globally

- Collected qualitative data on administrative, classroom, and compensatory practices