Primary school-aged children in low-income and conflict-affected countries are triply challenged in education. Attendance rates are among the lowest in the world. When children do attend school, their rates of learning are among the lowest in the world. And the history of conflict experienced by their communities and families result in other obstacles to both attendance and learning. This symposium presents early results from an impact evaluation of one major project – Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education (OPEQ) – which was designed to address these three challenges in three eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). DRC has the second lowest score on the Human Development Index among all countries in the world. Over the last two decades, the eastern DRC has been an epicenter for both inter- and intra-country conflict. OPEQ, designed and implemented by the International Rescue Committee in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the DRC, combines teacher training and coaching in literacy, numeracy and social-emotional learning via teaching learning circles. The overarching goal of OPEQ is to improve teacher motivation and performance and student learning outcomes.

The impact evaluation strives to employ the most rigorous methods in education science to one of the most challenging countries in the world. It was conducted in 146 schools which were randomized to roll out the intervention starting in 2011, 2012 or 2013. The papers presented in this symposium will use baseline (2011) and 1 year (2012) data. The first paper describes our work in developing and/or adapting measures of student processes and learning outcomes that are culturally appropriate, administratively feasible, reliable and valid: measures of children’s perceptions of how “child friendly” their teachers and schools are, their reading and math abilities and their mental health. These measures cover four of the seven “learning domains” recommended by the Learning Metrics Task Force to be tracked by the global education community to gauge progress on the emerging “Learning for All” agenda.

The second paper uses the literacy and numeracy measures described in the first paper to estimate the impact of OPEQ on these academic learning outcomes after one year of intervention.
in the pilot schools. The third paper uses the child-friendly schools and mental health measures to estimate impact of OPEQ after one year on the social-emotional learning outcomes. The second and third papers reporting impacts will also examine issues in the heterogeneity of impact by child characteristics (e.g. gender) and contextual characteristics (e.g. size of school).

To the best of our knowledge, this project represents the largest school-randomized trial of an intervention designed to improve both academic and social-emotional learning outcomes ever conducted in a conflict-affected country. The discussant, an expert on randomized trials of educational innovations and director for international research, will place this work in the context of major trends in international education including MDG goal 2 (to ensure universal access to primary education) and new global education goals emphasizing not only access, but learning for all.