Rapid Social Response (RSR) is helping to develop an early warning system to detect malnutrition in the wake of seasonal shocks. The project will benefit the vulnerable populations in the regions of SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region), Tigray, Amhara and Oromia.

**Rationale**

In Ethiopia, the effects of the 2008 food crisis were exacerbated by droughts, and by significantly reduced levels of remittances from Ethiopians living overseas. Then in 2011, the rains failed again over the Horn of Africa and new droughts pushed the already vulnerable deeper into poverty, and put millions in need of emergency food assistance.

Despite the reoccurrence of seasonal shocks that often results in famine in Ethiopia, the country has not, until now, had an efficient system in place that could predict looming food crises. The existing early warning system has been reporting indicators only on the food supply-side such as rainfalls and crop productions. In the absence of a system that routinely collects data on malnutrition, the government has had to rely on ad-hoc surveys for detecting problems. Consequently it has been difficult to respond in a timely way.

In 2009, the Federal Ministry of Health of Ethiopia (FMOH) launched the new National Nutrition Program (NNP) supported by a US$30 million grant from IDA that aims to improve nutritional status of young children and mothers. As part of the program, the government embarked on a reform to improve nutrition data management and utilization. The reform makes way for evidence-based decision making through a new Nutrition Information System (NIS).
Response

RSR is supporting the development and implementation of the new NIS in 11 particularly pastoral regions — where malnutrition is high, but little data is available. Here, RSR is helping the regional health bureaus to establish better data collection procedures and improve the quality of data from the existing sources. Examples of such sources include the Community-Based Nutrition (CBN) program routine data that actively involves families and community members in assessing health and nutrition-related problems of children and women, or the therapeutic feeding program that provides life-saving services to severely malnourished children.

Funds from RSR have also helped the Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute (ENHRI) to establish a central database to monitor and supervise the regular information flow from the districts to the regions, and made institutionalized linkages between the early warning system for nutrition and other information systems. This will enable a triangulation of food security data for increased validity and for agreement on thresholds for response.

Accomplishments to Date

• 838 focal persons in the districts are currently trained on data collection and management

• 200 focal persons in the zones* are currently trained on data quality and information management

*zone is the local government unit between district and region.

Next Steps

The FMOH is planning to hold a consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture and development partners, including UNICEF and WFP to agree on an institutional mechanism to strengthen the National Health Management Information System (HMIS) and specifically how the RSR-supported Nutrition Information System would contribute to the HMIS. The consultation will be held by the end of 2012—soon after the completion of the activities supported by the RSR — and form a basis for future resource planning and mobilization.