The Rapid Social Response Program is supporting the development of the first building blocks of a system to deliver aid to the poorest households in Tajikistan, so that the government and donors will have an effective and efficient way to intervene in ordinary times and during crises.

Rationale

The Government of Tajikistan addresses poverty, in part, through two main social-assistance programs. The largest program helps the poor afford electricity and gas, and the second largest is a cash-transfer program for needy families whose children attend school. Despite the value of such aid, the social assistance programs have done little to reduce poverty rates, a conclusion reached in the World Bank report Tajikistan: Delivering Social Assistance to the Poorest Households (Report No 56593-TJ, 2011).

At present the country has no consolidated listing of beneficiaries, only paper files spread among government offices in each district (rayon). In understaffed district offices, the files on beneficiaries of social assistance are often inaccurate, or at least out-of-date, creating an obstacle to effective social assistance that can actually help people climb out of poverty.

Response

To improve management of social assistance to the poor, the government, through an International Development Association (IDA) grant of US $3.2 million and the RSR fund, is building a National Registry for Social Protection. The registry, being tested...
in a pilot project launched in January 2011, will apply a proxy-means test to identify the poorest households eligible for social assistance. It will also help the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to better manage, monitor, and oversee payments to beneficiaries and eventually be used by other social protection programs in each region.

The pilot, which receives technical support from the European Union and the World Bank, consolidates the two largest social-assistance programs into a single benefit, and uses a proxy-means test to target benefits to the poorest 20 percent of the population. The RSR grant supports the pilot in two districts by building their capacity. The pilot will continue through 2012; before the end of that year, a statistical evaluation funded by the grant will be completed. The government will use the evaluation as it prepares for a nationwide roll-out of the reform of social assistance in 2014.

In addition to supporting the creation and evaluation of the registry, the RSR grant supports planning for the roll-out of the reform of social assistance and training civil servants in management, technical skills, and community work. The funding will help purchase electronic equipment for offices that process applications for social assistance. The grant will also help Ministry of Finance to improve budgeting and oversight to better serve the population.

Accomplishments to Date

- Launched pilot in two districts to test new national registry
- Started data collection for evaluation of pilot
- Supported government in preparing for national reform, pending pilot evaluation results