In the Amhara region of northwestern Ethiopia, the Water and Development Alliance (WADA) is making access to water and sanitation possible for thousands of poor rural residents. According to the UNDP Human Development Index, Ethiopia is among the five least developed countries in the world. Between 15 and 20 percent of the population experiences chronic food deficiency each year. Only 37 percent of Ethiopians have access to potable water and 18 percent to adequate sanitation. Water and sanitation-related diarrheal disease is among the top three causes of all deaths in Ethiopia, and Amhara is one of the regions that has faced this life threatening challenge for years.

To address these problems, WADA’s local partners are constructing gravity-fed water supply systems and shallow, hand-dug water wells, protecting springs, and providing schools with boys’ and girls’ latrines. Three implementing organizations working in partnership with the Millennium Water Alliance – World Vision, Food for the Hungry, and Catholic Relief Services – will also provide education and trainings necessary for families and children to operate and maintain these systems in a sustainable manner, promoting a foundation for economic development.

The WADA project is working with USAID’s “Champion Village Program,” which is promoting a community-level integrated package of health interventions including household latrine construction, improved access to water supply services, handwashing at schools, immunization, HIV/AIDS awareness, family planning, and other health activities. This broad, cross-cutting approach helps communities find a balance among priorities that have a major public health impact and encourages input and decision-making from the village members themselves.