

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF: PEACE AND JUSTICE

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY, ADVOCACY, PEACEBUILDING & NORTH-SOUTH SOLIDARITY

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1945 to respond to the needs of communities devastated by World War II. Since then, it has evolved from a relief agency shipping material resources to war-torn Europe to an agency that works with partners worldwide to respond to emergencies, seek lasting solutions to rural poverty, and work for peace and justice for all. LWR works to promote equity, strengthen organizational capacity, and empower communities to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, while continually learning to increase our impact. Headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, LWR works to reduce poverty and injustice by helping communities increase and expand the resources they need to live productive, healthy and empowered lives.

LWR'S APPROACH AND WORK

LWR works in **rural areas** around the world seeking to make an impact and **build sustainable, resilient, productive and just communities** through programs that:

- Alleviate human suffering in situations of both acute and chronic distress;
- Reduce the vulnerability of communities to natural and human-caused emergencies;
- Assist communities in satisfying their basic human rights for liberty and security, education, food, health, and livelihood, in ways that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable; and,
- Help communities become empowered to influence decision-makers on issues that affect their dignity and rights.

We approach these four goals through programming in **emergency response, risk management, sustainable rural development** and **peace and justice**. These four aspects of our work are integrally linked, each building on the other symbiotically to meet the needs and defend the rights of the community. Together, they work to increase community independence, augment the means to pursue and achieve productive livelihoods, and strengthen community voice in decision making processes, while reducing community vulnerability to external forces and events.

Accompaniment

LWR centers all of its work in a philosophy & framework called “accompaniment.” Rooted in the Lutheran tradition that believes empowerment and justice happen only by ‘standing with’, rather than ‘doing for’ others in need, accompaniment is a dynamic relationship between diverse partners with complementary resources and skills working together to empower poor communities to improve their lives. It recognizes that all poor communities already have resources and assets that can be harnessed to improve their own wellbeing. Building on these pre-existing assets, accompaniment is based on shared values and objectives, and uses jointly-developed strategies with flexibility and openness to achieve sustainable results. Characterized by mutual trust, respect, accountability, and transparency, the relationship contributes to each partner’s growth and learning while carrying out its primary goal of improving the well being of the poor.

In its emergency and development work, LWR uses accompaniment to work through existing structures and organizations (“partners”) where and whenever possible to foster community empowerment and to ensure resources are used to maximum effect. LWR seeks to be a catalyst for, and facilitator of, development and social change led by local organizations and impoverished people. Accompaniment is not only a relationship between LWR and its partners, but a process of working together. It uses a rights-based approach that relies on participatory and appreciative methods, leading-edge development techniques, effective program management, and organizational capacity building.

LWR'S COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

From its founding, LWR has advocated for justice as the critical basis of the development process. Our approach is rooted in Lutheran theology and international human rights law and norms, both of which stress the importance of human dignity and the need to defend and protect the political, economic, cultural, and social rights of the poor. LWR works with communities overseas and in the US for awareness and changes in structures and policies that will address the root causes of poverty and injustice, promote peace, and improve lives of impoverished people. All of LWR's advocacy positions are guided by three principles: emphasis on the rights of all people; respect for the planet; and support for human dignity. These traditions, commitment, and principles have made LWR a leader among U.S. faith-based organizations in mobilizing its constituents and overseas partners for action for justice worldwide.

LWR's advocacy work aims to raise our voice — and the voice of our partners — on priority issues. We do this in the U.S. by educating, organizing, and mobilizing U.S. Lutherans to advocate for justice, and overseas by supporting the capacity of impoverished communities to advocate for their rights. In addition, LWR works to create linkages between constituents in the global North and partners in the global South, and to strengthen South to South relationships in joint advocacy for just public policies.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Every day, all over the world, through harmful traditional practices, civil conflicts, unfair business practices or sheer tyranny, people's rights are violated. In many cases, systems to address human rights violations are missing, or victims lack information on how to access structures of recourse, face multiple barriers of poverty, physical security, education, and language to access national or international systems.

LWR's rights-based approach to development is guided not by charity but by the fact that we are all equal in God's eyes, and that all people have a fundamental right to basic human services such as health, education, and housing. Respect for human rights and development are tied together, and, as communities learn to advocate for their rights, they take control of their development process.

LWR's rights-based approach includes:

- Educating communities about their human rights – and how to protect them.
- Training communities, including “minority” religious, ethnic, and racial groups, to use legal channels to protect their rights to land and other natural resources.
- Improving gender equity and women's participation in household, community, and political decision-making.
- Advocating for international systems, like fair trade, that actually mandate women's participation in decisions that affect livelihoods and their community.
- Working with local advocacy groups to ensure that national laws respect fundamental human rights and provide systems of redress in the case of abuse.

HUMAN DIGNITY

LWR's vision that each person and every generation lives in justice, dignity and peace requires special emphasis in our work on gender equity and indigenous and minority rights. Our work seeks to encourage the active and equitable participation of both men and women regardless of ethnicity or religion in all aspects of the decision-making processes that affect their lives. As such, LWR has adopted equity as a crosscutting theme across all its emergency, development and advocacy work and within the organization itself.

- **Gender:** LWR approaches all of its work with an eye toward gender equity and a keen sense of both men and women's power and potential. By focusing much of our energies on women, we have seen time and again that empowered women become catalysts for change within their

families and communities, changing oppressive traditions and cultural norms that deprive people of the dignity to which we are all entitled, and helping both sexes understand and embrace the contributions that each can make. LWR works to ensure that a partnership for change develops, one that supports new patterns of collaboration and support between men and women in a community, that gender equity supports the contributions of both women and men in society. Working to promote the status and well-being of women is not only a moral imperative - it's a wise investment of our resources for reducing poverty and building healthy families and communities.

- ***Indigenous and ethnic minority communities:*** LWR works primarily in rural areas. This focus allows us to partner with communities who are often among the most marginalized in society. For example, much of our work in Latin America focuses on indigenous and Afro-Latino communities, working with local partners to promote the economic, cultural, legal, and political rights of the community. In Africa and Asia, LWR works with ethnic minority groups like the Dogon in Mali, the Dalits in India and the minority Muslims in the Philippines, exploring the means by which these groups can exercise their human rights, and to increase their organizational capacity for community empowerment and development. Throughout the world, LWR also seeks opportunities for interfaith dialogue to improve outcomes for peace and justice.

PEACEBUILDING

Every year around the world, millions of families' lives and livelihoods are endangered, and entire communities are displaced due to conflicts - over resources like land, water or oil, between ethnic or religious groups, or over political and social control. In many places, addressing issues of hunger, poverty, and suffering cannot begin until conflicts are resolved and peace established. At the same time, peacebuilding efforts must be tied to the very causes of conflict itself – inequities – and result in improvements people's everyday needs. As stated by one Lutheran Pastor working with LWR in Colombia, "peace will be brought about on the healing power of three meals a day". LWR and its partners seek to address the structural conditions that often lead to violence and conflict from both a development and justice perspective.

LWR works for long-lasting peace by:

- Protecting human rights and providing food, housing, financial assistance, and training to those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.
- Empowering people, churches and communities to practice active and inter-faith non-violent means of conflict negotiation and reconciliation.
- Teaching conflict resolution to prevent clashes due to the scarcity of resources like pasture land and water.
- Bringing the stories of those affected by conflict to U.S. citizens and others with the power to change U.S. policies that directly or indirectly influence peace.
- Assisting partners to amplify the voice of victims and those affected by conflict in national reconciliation programs, advocating for representation of minorities, women, and the poor at negotiating tables and in peace and justice commissions.
- Advocating with partners for policies that strengthen local and national institutions to provide stability for democracy, provide for schools, roads and hospitals, and implement judicial reform in protection of human rights and dignity

ADVOCACY BY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

LWR's approach to advocacy with our overseas partners is grounded in the belief that the only lasting way to eradicate poverty and injustice is for impoverished communities to exercise their rights. In the rights-based approach to development, rights and development must go hand-in-hand. LWR's objective is

to enable impoverished communities to challenge the causes and consequences of poverty and injustice by working with partner organizations to: document and use the lessons learned from our programs to support the case for policy change; strengthen the capacity of impoverished communities to organize and advocate for their rights; foster peoples ability and willingness to come together to address common needs through networks and alliances; and, demand that local and national governments provide the funding and programs necessary to ensure the basic human needs of every community, without distinction.

OUR WORK WITH U.S. CONSTITUENTS

LWR's U.S.-based work links the values of our mission with the voices of churches and citizens to mobilize support for policies that promote justice, dignity, and peace for all people. LWR's approach to U.S.-based advocacy is to equip its constituents to put "faith in action" through engagement in advocacy for responsible and just public policy.

Our advocacy office works to effectively promote, directly and through constituency-based efforts, policy positions and recommendations to policy-makers. It provides opportunities for U.S. Lutherans to become active participants in LWR's programs and campaigns to eradicate global poverty and injustice, and it serves as a trusted source of information for constituents. In this work, LWR uses lessons learned from its international programs to influence relevant public policies, and to work collaboratively with peer organizations to educate and mobilize constituencies. Current issues include our work on peace building in Colombia, economic justice issues, including Fair Trade, debt relief and global trade agreements, HIV/AIDS, and international humanitarian and conflict response, including the Asian tsunami, the food crisis in Niger, and conflict in the Philippines, Sudan, and Uganda.

NORTH SOUTH LINKAGES

In addition to working directly with U.S. constituents and partner communities abroad, LWR also seeks to form alliances with and among like-minded organizations in the countries in which we work and here in the U.S. These linkages are made by:

- Conducting study visits to the global South for US constituents and grassroots advocates
- Sponsoring speaking tours in the US by partners from the global South
- Publishing and distributing educational materials throughout the North and South
- Supporting the media and educational work of Northern and Southern coalitions.
- Strengthening the ability of grassroots advocates and coalitions in the South and North to advocate for justice issues to domestic and international policy makers
- Passing resolutions by churches and faith-based communities in the North and South to support advocacy issues
- Hosting legislative briefings in which our Southern partners present their views directly to US policy-makers
- Assisting US policy makers to visit partners and communities in the global south, particularly those affected by extreme poverty, conflict, or disaster.

In a long-term project entitled, *Give Peace a Place*, LWR connects communities of faith in Colombia and in the U.S., to learn from each other and strengthen their community education, mobilization and advocacy work. Together, the US and Colombian churches provide information to the media and to Colombian and U.S. governments on successful peaceful alternatives to the conflict in Colombia.

OUR NETWORKS

To ensure maximum impact, LWR works with a range of advocacy allies, some of whom including ecumenical alliances and networks, secular issue- or region-focused advocacy groups; and partners in the countries in which we work.

“To others, through others.” A simple but profound basis for our work – of people caring for and learning from one another. As LWR enters its 60th year of service, its conviction to love our neighbors as ourselves remains constant. As such, LWR continues to advocate for solutions that save lives, promote well-being and protect livelihoods in the communities it serves. LWR works with poor and powerless communities to challenge not only the consequences of poverty and oppression but also the causes. LWR also helps U.S. Lutherans become informed about the causes and consequences of global hunger, poverty, violence and marginalization, and equip them to be active participants in LWR’s programs through the choices they make as disciples, stewards, consumers and citizens. From helping rural communities obtain legal documents like birth and marriage certificates in Burkina Faso and Bolivia to securing land titles for farmers in the Philippines to encouraging congregations in the U.S. to increase demand for fair trade products, LWR is working toward its vision of “a world in which each person and every generation lives in justice, dignity, and peace.”