LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF’S APPROACH TO RURAL ECONOMIES AND AGRICULTURAL LIVELIHOODS

Since 1945, Lutheran World Relief’s enduring commitment to the proven potential of agriculture to create positive and sustainable socioeconomic change for marginalized rural populations has been at the heart of our mission to end poverty, injustice and human suffering around the world. Our goal is grounded in the following principles:

OUR SYSTEMS APPROACH

Rural agricultural economies, and the people within them, influence and are influenced by broader market, social and environmental systems. To build inclusive and thriving rural economies and communities, Lutheran World Relief analyzes the interactions of these systems to gain a holistic understanding of the gaps, barriers, and opportunities we can address through our development programming.

Since 1945, Lutheran World Relief has been successfully tackling poverty in some of the world’s hardest-to-reach places. We provide relief in emergencies and help families restore their lives. We partner with communities to build and grow rural economies that are beneficial to the poorest farmer. By investing in people, their skills, and strengthening their ability to adapt, we help them build the resilience they need to thrive.
MARKET SYSTEMS
We address the underlying causes of market failures that hurt agriculture-based livelihoods. Our approach focuses on stimulating a change in the behavior of market players — public and private, formal and informal — so that they are better able and motivated to perform important market functions effectively. We identify and support market players that have the motivation and ability to influence market systems in favor of marginalized farmers and rural communities.

ENTERPRISES
Lutheran World Relief believes that enterprises can generate the most direct benefits for the small-scale farmers, producers and service providers they represent as facilitators of improved access to resources, knowledge and buyers. We build the capacities of socially conscious enterprises to effectively intermediate between farmers, local and international buyers, auxiliary service providers, and public policy makers to address the market issues that keep many in poverty.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS
Lutheran World Relief’s social systems approach builds trust and inclusive relationships among traditionally marginalized people so they can more effectively organize and advocate for their interests within market systems. It also links small-scale farmers and rural communities to influential actors within the rural economy that control and allocate resources and influence policy and participation in order to expand opportunities and access for all.

SOCIAL CAPITAL
Lutheran World Relief defines social capital as “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to trust each other, collaborate and work together in pursuit of their livelihood objectives.” In our work, we consciously develop positive social capital among farmers, groups, communities, enterprises, and other influential market and government actors with the aim of reducing power disparities, promoting collective action, increasing access to information and resources, and increasing participation within a rural economy. As a part of this effort, we strive to break down the negative social capital that can exist among groups that excludes others, such as women and youth.

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS
Lutheran World Relief’s environmental systems approach protects land and water resources from the impacts of climate change and from extractive and polluting agricultural practices. We foster climate resilient agriculture landscapes to ensure the sustainable productivity and wellbeing of farmers and their communities for the long-term.

WATER AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Lutheran World Relief promotes the approaches of Integrated Water Resource Management and Sustainable Land Management to increase farmer productivity and profitability in ways that conserve the land and water that makes agriculture possible and supports farmers as they adapt to their changing environment.

OUR CROSS-CUTTING THEMES
Gender equity, positive youth development (PYD), and resilience are essential to the achievement of our goal to grow inclusive rural economies and reduce poverty through agriculture development. Lutheran World Relief assesses the gender constraints, youth needs, and shocks and stressors that are affecting a rural community’s ability to thrive. From these assessments we design programming that promotes the full participation of women and young people in the rural economy and builds the community’s ability to remain stable and sustain economic growth when difficult times hit. Careful attention to these three themes in our programming ensures we remain aligned with our principles and provide the highest quality of service with lasting benefits for all.

1 In this context, Lutheran World Relief is speaking of enterprises at all levels – farmer/ village extension agent (VEA), cooperative, small/ medium/large business, multinational company – that are socially inclusive and have a social impact element in their operations.