

# LWR VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

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PRESENTER NOTES

September 20, 2007

Class 1: STATE OF THE PLANET

Presenter: President John Nunes

First and foremost, living out our mission and vision statements require a just shift in perspectives.

Retainer story.

Mission Statement: Lutheran World Relief works with partners in 35 countries to help people grow food, improve health, strengthen communities, end conflict, build livelihoods, and recover from disasters. With people in the U.S., we work for justice for those we serve.

This is our statement, but what does it mean? What does it mean to live out partnership in 35 countries? To help people grow food - food that will feed them their families and earn an income, etc.

**East Africa** – Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania

**West Africa** – Mali, Niger, Liberia, Burkina Faso

**Regional Context:** Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has been working in Africa for more than 40 years, building lasting partnerships with local organizations to reduce poverty and oppression and help communities recover from both natural and human-caused disasters. Today, Africa struggles with increasing levels of hunger and poverty.

Half the population of Africa live on less than one dollar a day. That's more than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa alone. This number is expected to rise to 400 million by 2015. As a corollary, every cow in Europe receives almost US\$2 a day in subsidies, double the average income in Africa. Outdated agricultural techniques, environmental degradation, war and severe weather patterns that bring recurring drought are decreasing crop yields and food availability. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has placed additional burdens on families and communities already struggling to survive.

Within this context, LWR works to improve food and water security for rural farmers, combat debilitating disease like malaria, prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its social and economic impact on communities, and strengthen the capacities of local organizations to address the needs of rural communities in all of these areas.

LWR's strategy over the next five years will focus on working with local partners to:

- Support small farmers to improve the quality and yield of their crops and to find profitable markets for them.
- Prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its economic and social impact through care and support to those affected by the disease, especially widows and orphans.
- Enable communities to better manage their risk from natural and human-caused disasters through disaster preparedness, environmental rehabilitation, and conflict resolution.

LWR is committed to supporting the struggle for economic and social justice throughout Africa. To maximize its impact, it has focused its work on six countries: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in West Africa and Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in East Africa.

**Middle East** - Jerusalem, W. Bank/Gaza

**Asia** – India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has been working in Asia and the Middle East for more than 50 years, building lasting partnerships with local organizations to reduce poverty and oppression and help communities recover from both natural and human-caused disasters. LWR's early efforts in the region focused on humanitarian relief for victims of earthquakes, floods, cyclones and armed conflict.

Today LWR's partner organizations continue to prepare themselves to better cope with the continuous occurrence of humanitarian emergencies, both natural and manmade. The growing number of internally displaced people and refugees in the region indicates the failure of peace and reconciliation efforts by the governments and civil society in this conflict-prone region. Added to this, explosive situations in the Middle East and Kashmir are diverting scarce resources to war efforts. This humanitarian focus is enhanced by LWR's specific attention to sustainable development, food and water security, gender equity, education, and peace and justice.

LWR's strategy over the next five years will focus on working with local partners to:

- Reduce the physical and social vulnerability of impoverished people living in disaster zones. Measures include cyclone shelters and safe building practices to reduce vulnerability to earthquakes and cyclones and strengthening the capacity of local leadership, especially women in disaster preparedness and mitigation.
- Ensure adequate representation of women in political processes. Social, cultural and religious norms are major obstacles for the empowerment of women.
- Work with the *dalits* and other ethnic minorities in India, Palestinians in the Middle East, indigenous people in the Philippines, and fisher folk in India and the Philippines who suffer social and economic discrimination.
- Increase food and water security by addressing land and water access, as well as trade and environmental issues)
- Manage and resolve conflict by training communities in peace building and reconciliation, reducing violence, and trauma counseling.
- Assist tsunami-affected communities in the long recovery and rebuilding process.

**Central America** – El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua

**South America** – Peru, Colombia, Bolivia

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has been working in Latin America for more than 45 years, building lasting partnerships with local organizations to reduce poverty and oppression and help communities recover from both natural and human-caused disasters. LWR's early efforts in the region focused on humanitarian relief and food security as the region struggled with dictatorships and guerilla movements.

Today, Latin America faces new challenges: a widening gap between rich and poor; environmental degradation which threatens crop yields and places marginalized communities at greater risk from natural disasters; and global markets in which small farmers find it increasingly difficult to compete. While the region made remarkable gains in democracy and human rights in previous decades, civil society remains fragile in many countries, where citizens are not yet empowered or equipped to effectively participate in the public sphere. Meanwhile, ongoing civil war in Colombia has displaced 3 million people and threatens to spill over the borders and destabilize neighboring societies and economies.

Within this context, LWR works to improve food and water security for rural farmers, increase their incomes, strengthen the capacities of local organizations – all to help create sustainable rural livelihoods and communities – and work for justice and peace.

Because LWR believes that impoverished people can and must play the leading role in ending poverty and injustice, it works in partnership with local churches, non-governmental, faith-based and community-based organizations to address the challenges of environmental degradation, unsustainable livelihoods, natural disasters and civil conflict. Through these partnerships, LWR provides not only funding but technical assistance and expertise and a commitment to mutual trust, respect and accountability.

LWR's strategy over the next five years will focus on working with local partners to:

- Support small farmers to improve the quality and yield of their crops and to find profitable markets for them.
- Enable communities to better manage their risk from natural disasters, through disaster preparedness, community organization, and environmental rehabilitation.
- In the case of Colombia, support local efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and to work for peace.

Last-mile communities - The places we work are mostly rural –

Picture taken in Peru, in the department of Cajamarca, a (clearly) mountainous region in the north of the country

Confronting those disease that aggravate existent health problems. The challenges faced by the people with whom LWR works are many – HIV/AIDS, poverty, oppression, conflict, lack of access to resources and markets, environmental issues, discrimination,

marginalization, man-made and natural disasters, hunger and many other factors all work in various combinations to make and keep people poor.

No matter how much progress is made in meeting these challenges LWR has seen time and again one issue, one disease – malaria – that cuts across all age groups in almost every country where we work, consistently devastating lives and blocking progress.

Despite growing worldwide attention, malaria presents an overwhelming threat and burden to more than 40% of the world's population. Between 350 million and 500 million people contract malaria each year, and the disease kills more than a million people annually, the vast majority of them children in Africa. While affecting all age groups and both sexes, malaria has a disproportionate effect on children and pregnant mothers and their babies, affecting the next generation and those who take care of them.

- Approximately 40% of the world's population, mostly those living in the world's poorest countries, is at risk of contracting malaria.
- Malaria causes more than 300 million acute illnesses and at least one million deaths annually.

To date, LWR has focused on malaria with a key partner: the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in Maharashtra State, India. This project, winner of the Magsaysay Award (known as the Asian Nobel Prize) focuses on changing community behavior through information and training. LWR has also proposed a new project in Tanzania that would reach more than 1.6 million people, using a network of more than 600 Lutheran churches to educate people about malaria prevention and treatment.

In a recent review of LWR's strategy in Africa, LWR partners and staff consistently identified malaria as the single issue that most affects LWR's work and which LWR is most called to address in a sustainable way. LWR's accompaniment approach allows us to build upon existing skills and resources to address community needs; the approach utilizes our resources and skills to complement those of our partner organizations to work together to empower communities to improve their lives and build on these pre-existing assets. In Africa, LWR has a long history of collaboration with leading church-related hospitals and development organizations, ranging from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (the provider of 15 percent of that country's health care) to Phoebe Hospital in Liberia.

Our efforts are informed by LWR's previous successes in the field. We will apply lessons learned and best practices from such successful past efforts as:

- Groundbreaking peace and conflict resolution work in Colombia, partnering Colombian and U.S. Churches
- Coffee production in Nicaragua that exceeded production targets and sales, enabling more than 500 farms to receive organic certification and fair trade prices.
- Agricultural support projects in Uganda that have provided community members income to handle the care and support for more than 50 HIV/AIDS orphans in their village without external support

- The provision of free legal aid to more than 30,000 indigenous inhabitants in Bolivia so they can participate in political and economic arenas.

Images of the communities in which we work – people made in the image of God.

Hymn #396 in the Green LBW:

You came into our hall of death,  
O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air,  
To drink for us the deep despair  
That strangled our reluctant breath.

- Martin Franzmann

These Christian waters are not...the waters of a private beach reserved for snooty Greeks who, like Parmenides and Plato, looked with disdain upon commoners, the *hoi polloi*. On the contrary, they are public beaches, waters that are especially reserved for the great unwashed, that is, for precisely the ones who need water and cleaning...

The characters of the [New Testament] kingdom are a cast of outcasts, of outsiders: sinners, lost sheep, lost coins, lost and prodigal sons, tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, lepers, the dispossessed, the children.” - John Caputo

Who is on this list in 2007?

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