



## CAPABILITY STATEMENT

# PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION



## PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA) SNAPSHOT

*“Knowledge is Power! There is nothing as fulfilling as being given the power to discover oneself, realize who you are, unleash your potential, unearth what resources are locally available and at your disposal and knowing how to utilize them to meet one’s most felt needs. PLA gives people the power to come together, reason, discover, benefit, and ultimately live dignified lives. With this, we can as well conclude by summarizing PLA with a simple slogan; “ASK THEM, THEY KNOW IT, THEY CAN DO IT!” - WR Partner and PLA Trainer, ADS Pwani, Kenya*

## Who is World Renew?

World Renew is a faith-based international development and humanitarian organization, working since 1962 to address the root causes and impacts of poverty, disaster, and injustice. With a USD \$45.6 million budget in 2023, we work with 67 local partners and have a long-term presence in 19 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, bringing permanent, sustainable change to vulnerable communities and working towards the Sustainable Development Goals. We provide consultation, technical assistance, and funding to strengthen the capacity of our partners as they implement programs that integrate food security, health, economic opportunities, peacebuilding and justice, disaster response and preparedness, and gender equality. As an industry leader in local ownership of programs, we use Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodologies so communities can identify challenges, evaluate their assets, and generate their own solutions.

## Our PLA Work

PLA approaches are employed all through the lifecycle of any project as a locally-led way to engage communities, facilitating their use of tools and activities to gather crucial information and enable them to decide which action steps to take. Through PLA, sometimes known as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal), rich insights and in-depth understanding of the community’s assets, needs, perspectives and priorities are developed. PLA builds a high level of confidence and supports communities to develop action plans for their future, which helps us to identify the types of projects to initiate. PLA tools are relevant and appropriate means of engaging communities of any kind and context. PLA ensures a community’s capacity to envision, design and implement sustainable community-driven interventions. Tools are translated into local languages and are contextualized based on community practices and literacy levels to ensure full access and participation. We recognize that participation and learning at all stages of the project cycle ensures that programs take into account local realities. We recognize the necessity of building the capacity of local people to meaningfully lead on changing their story and make decisions, which also ensures the sustainability of project benefits beyond the life of projects. PLA ensures a community’s capacity to envision, design and implement sustainable community-driven interventions.

## Key Programming Approaches

- **Facilitating empowerment:** Communities recognize existing power imbalances and shift to collective decision making, empowering them to self-organize and take control of their future.
- **Contextualization:** Tools and approaches are adapted to fit each community’s unique context - there is no fixed way of applying them.

- **Inclusion & Participation:** Women, men, boys and girls regardless of race, religion, ability, social status, and other intersectional identities work together to address issues. Through participation, they experience inclusion, ownership and decision-making.
- **Learning:** PLA tools like maps, diagrams and role plays bring out sensitive information on gender and power relations. Communities collect and analyze information, drawing their own meaning to make decisions, improve their lives and learn from each other.

## Our Expertise in PLA

World Renew and partner staff continue to work as guides, facilitating participatory tools and asking the right questions that enable community members to see themselves as worthy of participation in their development. World Renew designed a “Beyond the Tools” PLA training as a grassroots approach that is deeply embedded in our programs and institutional culture since the early 1980’s. Through our in-house workshops and virtual Beyond the Tools course, we and our partner staff are mentored and coached by seasoned PLA module facilitators. They journey with staff to enhance community participation for sustainable and locally-led development. World Renew has a track record in participatory processes, which resulted in the handbook, *“Partnering to build and measure organizational capacity”*, a three-year inquiry into the best practices of partnership and organizational capacity building. A key feature of organizational and community capacity is the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn. Our programs integrate PLA from partnership research and development to project design and implementation. Canadian and USA donor agencies support us in promoting PLA and enabling communities to explore their full potential through PLA in agriculture, livelihoods and health projects funded through Imago Dei, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Global Affairs Canada and private donors. We work with partners, communities and donors to make the process more participatory, objective, and empowering.

***“PLA is the way to go, my work is becoming easier than before! The community is empowered to analyze its own problems and find solutions other than providing them with solutions.”***

***- World Renew Partner Staff, Malawi***

## Evidence of Impact

In 2021, World Renew Kenya and partner ADS Central Rift, Solai, were awarded a 3-year \$500,000 USD food security and livelihoods grant from USAID Kenya, “Conservation Agriculture” Plus (CAPlus), that focused on improved livelihoods and increased food security for 3,000 farmers through the application of CA principles. Capacity building was central to the project, including through the objective of “increased effectiveness of local partners to achieve locally led development”, which was reached through the introduction of PLA methodologies to local stakeholders and community members. Training by active participation of local partners resulted in a clear understanding of the local context, engagement of local men and women in identifying their own challenges, resources, and opportunities, which led to long-term goal planning and Community Action Plans (CAPs) in three counties developed by stakeholder representatives including the government, participants and the private sector. These CAPs were focused on three areas of development – water, food security and economy – and through local engagement and fundraising the project secured project cost contributions of between 17-83% from the communities and regional public budgets.

## Best Practices and Innovations

- **Localization:** With locally-led development central to our work, all development projects use PLA to empower communities to identify opportunities, resources, challenges and prioritize intervention areas. Communities leverage their experiences to understand their challenges and make decisions towards their chosen path of transformation.
- **Co-Creation:** Communities, World Renew and partner staff work together to co-create initiatives through participating in PLAs, building trust and establishing critical relationships with stakeholders to create meaningful and effective initiatives.
- **Gender Equity:** PLA enables community members to explore and identify gender inequities, using tools like the 24-Hour Calendar where men and women break down their daily responsibilities, revealing the increased domestic burden on women and girls.

