

DISCUSSION PAPER

PARTICIPATION
IN THE WORK OF MISEREOR
- A Discussion Paper -

THEMATIC GROUP ON PARTICIPATION

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Executive summary

MISEREOR has always seen participation of the poor, their access to public services, economic resources and political decision-making processes, as an indispensable element of poverty alleviation. Participation is at the same time a goal, a principle and an instrument of development cooperation designed to sustainably improve the living conditions and the dignity of the poor. This comprehensive understanding of participation is rooted in the call for social justice and the preferential option for the poor, which are guiding principles of Christian social ethics. It is a cross-cutting task both for overseas project work and for our work here in Germany.

When promoting civil society participation of the poor we should remain aware of different levels and degrees:

- Participation can occur in various forms and on various scales: as simple access to information, as monitoring, as consultation, or as binding participation in decision-making.
- Participation can take place in projects, and/or can be the designated objective of promotion measures in specially designed projects or traditional sector work. A third area is the institutionalisation and mainstreaming of participation.
- Participation in political processes can take place at the local, regional, national or international level.
- When implementing participation it is necessary to take into account both the social, institutional and external frameworks in place, and the capacities and mindsets which MISEREOR and its project partners bring with them into that situation.

It is always important to establish in dialogue with the partner organisations, and where possible the people concerned themselves, what the concrete possibilities, limits and costs of participation will be. These should then be reviewed as to their effectiveness for sustainable poverty reduction. It will then be possible to incorporate shared values and value judgements into the strategies, agreed objectives and division of tasks, thus making the procedure transparent for all.

1. Preliminary remark

The present discussion paper is designed primarily for MISEREOR staff members and its overseas partner organisations. It aims to help create as broad an understanding and consensus as possible as to how civil society participation of the poor can be conceptualised and implemented as a fundamental cross-cutting task in the work of MISEREOR. Beyond that, we hope that this discussion paper will also be of interest to other (civil society, public and private) development cooperation actors. We thus hope to promote the cause of participation of the poor in development processes, and at the same time to define as clearly as possible MISEREOR's role in relation to other actors.

This discussion paper was prepared by MISEREOR's Thematic Group on Participation in a process lasting several years, in the course of which numerous discussions and consultations were held.¹

¹ For a more detailed description of this process, please refer to the Annex.

2. Introduction

Participation of the poor in economic, social and political development is a core concern of MISEREOR. Working for participation of the poor as subjects of the life of society is therefore an indispensable principle of MISEREOR's efforts to fight poverty. The development maxim of "helping people help themselves", in place since MISEREOR was founded, implies an understanding of development according to which comprehensive human development would be neither desirable nor possible nor sustainable without participation of the poor. This principle is reflected in all sectors of cooperation. Health care, education, water, food, urban and rural development are all areas where participation is practiced, promoted and required, along with expressly political work. MISEREOR's principle of partnership is also founded on this understanding. When MISEREOR supports processes that are to be owned by the poor, the corresponding interventions delivered in partnership must also strengthen this self-help and ownership.

Participation of the poor and the disadvantaged must be fought for and defended. This struggle must be waged at the local, national and international levels as states and civil societies engage and interact in their respective contexts of different economic and political interests and frameworks. What can MISEREOR and its partners in the South contribute to this? Which aspects of their own performance can and should they also be improving in this context? There are no standard, universally applicable answers to these questions. The conditions and scope for effective participation of the poor vary from country to country, and often also within a country. The answers to the question of how poverty reduction and participation can best be promoted must also vary correspondingly. Above all, though, these answers themselves must be sought and found on a participatory basis. Pro-poor and participatory development cooperation can only succeed as a joint learning process.

Promoting civil society participation of the poor and the disadvantaged was and is a heartfelt concern and an exciting area of learning for MISEREOR and its partners in the South. Civil society participation therefore plays a key role for MISEREOR, both in projects and in advocacy work. Much has been achieved in this respect; at the same time, though, numerous difficulties and deficits have also come to light. A critical analysis of project experience, feedback from partners and staff members, as well as engagement with the international debate also make it clear that civil society participation is a complex theme with numerous links to other areas. We, the members of MISEREOR's Thematic Group on Participation, have attempted to take adequate account of this complexity without losing sight of the core issue for this discussion paper: the role that civil society participation can and should play in MISEREOR's pro-poor development cooperation, in order to help sustainably improve the lives of the poor.

3. Fundamentals for the promotion of civil society participation by MISEREOR

3.1 On the understanding of participation

Participation means more than just being involved in technical problem-solving. It is a basic political demand that applies at all levels of (global) society: from urban municipalities and village councils to central government, from national parliaments to international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, from political parties to trade unions, associations, women's organisations and human rights groups. Civil society participation means that all citizens (Latin: *civis*) as a matter of basic principle have the same right and the same

obligation toward the common good to play an active role in helping shape and develop their polity. The ability to exercise this basic right and the responsibility that goes with it helps define the dignity of the human being as the subject of her history. On this understanding, "participation" means participation not only in state institutions, but also in other social spaces such as free media, social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). What remains key here, however, is a basic orientation of citizen participation toward the common good. This means we need to distinguish civil society from particular economic interests: private-sector organisations are not included in the term "civil society", even though they are not state actors. This distinction is important, because the term "non-state actors" is often used in the development-policy debate without any such distinction being made.

Participation can be practiced in various forms.

- In order for people to be able to participate in political processes, certain elementary preconditions must be in place. Access to these preconditions (basic needs, education, transport, means of communication etc.) must in principle be guaranteed for all, and this in itself already constitutes a basic form of participation in societal life.
- A further basis for meaningful participation is transparency and access to publicly relevant information. This is the only way in which political processes can be subjected to public scrutiny, and in which citizens can be enabled to participate in political debates and develop their own (contrary) positions. To insist on transparency of political decision-making and benefit from it for critical scrutiny and debate constitutes another fundamental form of participation.
- Participation in political processes can be translated into reality in a variety of ways, e.g. through the media or through public consultation processes. Consultative processes of this kind can even be prescribed, as is the case for instance with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).
- A further step is mandatory participation in decision-making processes. At this interface between the constitutionally legitimated competences of publicly mandated agencies, and civil society, special care must be taken to ensure that responsibility and representativity are clearly assigned to the appropriate decision-makers.
- Finally, numerous civil society organisations participate in public life by performing tasks for society. This can take place with support from the state, or independently thereof.

Civil society participation is neither one-dimensional nor static. The above-mentioned forms may overlap or may exist independently of each other. In projects, and in relations with project partners in general, it is therefore important for MISEREOR to ascertain in each individual case which form of participation is meant, and what expectations the participating actors have. From MISEREOR's perspective it remains crucial that civil society participation should enable the poor and the excluded to assume an active role within the society of which they are a part, and help shape and determine its political processes. This will not always be fully possible for all from the outset. Participation itself develops as a process. In each instance MISEREOR must therefore itself ascertain the time frame, and raise this issue in dialogue with the partner(s): What level of participation is already in place, what level would we like to achieve within what time frame?

Those who wield power often prevent or instrumentalise the active participation of citizens. And the poor in particular lack opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes

that are of such importance for their lives, even where they make up the majority of the population. Participation reaches its limits: externally, wherever its scope is constrained, but also internally, wherever it would be inappropriate, inopportune or even counterproductive. Engaging with these external and internal limits is part of the process of participation. How much (and whose) time and money is participation for instance allowed to cost? How much specialist expertise is needed for meaningful participation? How are conflicts of interest and imbalances of power resolved on a participatory basis? Who determines the methods and limits, the degree and the nature of participation in each individual case? Who decides whether participation has taken place merely pro forma or "in reality"? If the poor are to be the agents of their own sustainable development, then it is they who will need to invest their limited resources of time, energy and labour, and often also take risks. They should therefore also be the ones to determine the limits and risks of participation, and how they face these.

To support these processes within a society it is absolutely essential to help strengthen the organisational capacities, the political awareness and the professional expertise of poor sections of the population. Civil society actors and non-governmental organisations, social movements and Churches have an important role to play here: They support the poor in articulating their concerns and asserting their demands vis-à-vis those in political power.

Not least, participation also means equal participation by women and men. In the past, however, efforts to reduce women's poverty and marginalisation have failed to produce satisfactory results. In the global context, women constitute the largest group whose full human rights are being denied. In some countries this discrimination occurs blatantly. In others, while the constitution does lay down equal and full rights for women, legislation does exist - especially in family and inheritance law - that contradicts these declarations. Economic and family dependencies prevent women from taking an active stance and demanding their rights. A targeted promotion of the organisation of women can help create an enabling framework for a growing political engagement by poor and marginalised women. Women's organisations are therefore key players in the promotion of women's rights, democracy and civil rights. Women's presence in grass-roots organisations and decision-making bodies has increased within the sphere of influence of many projects. However, to date barely any strategies are in place to systematically "engender" spaces for political participation.

Based on a distinction made in German official development assistance², civil society participation in the context of MISEREOR's practical work can also be divided into three categories:

- a) participation in processes at the level of projects, including project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- b) projects that aim explicitly to promote active participation by citizens in political decision-making processes, to a growing extent also in traditional sectors such as rural development, habitat, health or education where participation is seen as a key factor for partner-owned and partner-driven development;
- c) the mainstreaming of participation in regulations, laws and institutions that can create enabling frameworks guaranteeing efficient and sustainable popular participation.

In this sense, participation is both a goal of development-policy action and a principle and instrument of poverty reduction and democratisation.

² Cf. GTZ: Sector Project Mainstreaming Participation (eds.), Promoting participatory development in German development cooperation – from a guiding vision to practical development work, Eschborn: GTZ 2006, 10ff.

3.2 Social justice – a guiding principle of Christian social ethics

MISEREOR sees its work for the participation of the poor and disadvantaged as the political extension of its original motto of "Helping people help themselves". MISEREOR's work therefore aims to help enable the poor to harness their potential for their own development and that of their fellow human beings, and channel it into the political development processes of their societies. These activities for empowerment target both the poor and the marginalised themselves, and the frameworks and conditions under which they live. Poor people can and must become the agents of their own history. This includes both participating in social and political processes, and sharing in the goods and opportunities afforded by a society (e.g. access to education). This goal remains in place, even where frameworks and conditions are not conducive to achieving it. The call for opportunities to participate in society's processes means that citizen participation is not only a matter of individual ethics, but is also relevant at the level of society and institutions. Participation is therefore also a matter of Christian social ethics.³

This begins with the fundamental call for social justice. Christian social ethics understands social justice as the comprehensive justice that is measured by the "common good of all". A society possesses a social order oriented toward the common good when it respects the criteria of personhood, solidarity and subsidiarity. In this context, social justice is thus the guiding principle of "participation".⁴ Contributive justice should be understood here as an integral component of social justice. Participation of the poor does not, however, automatically guarantee an orientation toward the common good. Here too we can anticipate selfishness on the part of both individuals and groups, and the problem persists of how long-term issues can be addressed in the interests of future generations. However, since it is a characteristic feature of poverty that poor people, unlike the rich and powerful, are unable to assert their interests appropriately, while participation of the poor may not be a sufficient condition for social justice, it is a necessary one.

For the first time in the history of Catholic social teaching, the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church"⁵ published in 2004 devotes a whole chapter to the issue of participation:

³ The call for fair participation made by Christian social ethics "is based on the Biblical understanding of the human person, according to which God made man and woman in His own image, so that they could participate in His Creation. For this crucial reason, all people on earth (the entire human family) are bearers of fundamentally equal dignity by virtue of having been made in God's own image. On this basis the human person is the subject, the creator and the end of all social institutions, which is why every person is entitled to participate in social, economic, political and cultural activity." Yohannes Ghebremedhin, *Beteiligungsgerechtigkeit für Sub-Sahara-Afrika im Prozess der Globalisierung*, Hamburg 2003, 455 [Quote from "Fair participation for sub-Saharan Africa in the globalisation process" rendered into English by the present translator.]

⁴ Social justice understood as comprehensive justice can be broken down further into four constituent elements: commutative justice, contributive justice, distributive justice and procedural justice (cf. Arno Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik. Einführung und Prinzipien* [Christian social ethics. Introduction and principles], Paderborn 1997, 221-223, quote rendered into English by the present translator).

⁵ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The English and Italian original versions of this document, also known as the "Social Catechism", were published in October 2004.

"The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation, which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs." (Compendium, No. 189)

Rights of participation are called for both at the level of individuals (citizens, both women and men alike), and at the structural level (the state and society):

"Participation can be achieved in all the different relationships between the citizen and institutions: to this end, particular attention must be given to the historical and social contexts in which such participation can truly be brought about." (Compendium, No. 191).

A further key point of reference for the understanding of participation from the perspective of Catholic social teaching is the "preferential option for the poor". The life situation of the poor is characterised by a lack of participation, which means their human dignity is compromised. In this context, participation includes not only the dimension of securing a material livelihood, but also the political, social and cultural dimensions. "The option for the poor highlights the fact that material poverty should be considered the strongest and most degrading form of lack of participation."⁶ MISEREOR's understanding of participation in the sense of Christian social ethics with its preferential option for the poor draws attention to the fact that not only the protection of basic political rights, but also the securing of material livelihoods are highly relevant enabling conditions for participation.

Christian social ethics analyses and evaluates social, political and economic structures and interventions, judging them by their consequences for the weakest sections of society, and the fairness of the opportunities for participation which the society offers those groups. This key role of participation also means that pro-poor changes must be achieved together with the poor, and not just "for them". This, incidentally, is something that applies not only to development cooperation with people in the South. In Germany too there are numerous areas where MISEREOR can become involved in activities for more just global development, without neglecting its core mandate.

Conclusions:

- MISEREOR should make transparent in dialogue with its partners its understanding of participation as a cornerstone of pro-poor development cooperation, as well as the fundamental principles which underpin that understanding. This is the only way in which to develop and agree on an adequate basis of shared values and joint objectives, into which specific measures can be appropriately integrated and their effects monitored and assessed.
- MISEREOR should conduct this dialogue on values and principles openly and sensitively as an intercultural dialogue. Basic ethical attitudes and convictions often have an enormous impact, without the actors concerned being explicitly aware of them. This can very quickly lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. At the level of instruments and measures to implement joint goals, however, intercultural expertise is essential.

⁶ Anzenbacher, 206.

- MISEREOR should continually review its own work to ascertain whether participation of the poor is given due consideration not only in the organisation's objectives, but also in its own internal processes and structures. The same also applies to the work of the partners in the South.
- MISEREOR should actively advocate its understanding of participation in the development-policy debate, which is otherwise often reduced to economic or technocratic aspects.
- MISEREOR should put to good use in its work in Germany its experience gained in co-operation and dialogue with partners in the South in the context of participatory social development.

INDIA - participation of women

When helping develop and network self-help groups, the development agency **Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)** in the Indian state of Gujarat attached priority to the empowerment of these target groups, to enable them to participate actively and self-reliantly in decision-making, planning and implementation of local self-governance ('Panchayati Raj'). It is stimulating local learning processes, in order to reduce dependency on external consultancy and financial inputs in the long term.

SSP utilises social crises as an opportunity to break down social barriers, especially in the context of gender, but also in relation to the caste system. By carefully focusing the work on women, in the course of the post-earthquake reconstruction activities in 2001, SSP succeeded for the first time in involving women, most of them poor and from low castes, in the planning and implementation of governmental emergency aid programmes. This enabled them to break out of their social and economic isolation. By organising women in a way that cut across boundaries of caste and religion, it was possible to loosen the hitherto strict social and geographical separation of members of different castes and religions.

In the Indian context women's participation is not automatic and does not go unquestioned, especially where access to political decision-making and resources is at stake, which is reserved exclusively for men and dominant sections of the population. Women who previously barely ever left their houses have for the first time actively articulated and asserted their concerns and needs in the development process. They are also raising awareness and an understanding of the need for development in their villages (e.g. on water, sanitation infrastructure). As a result, development problems are now being seen and addressed in their full complexity, which has significantly raised the effectiveness of measures.

SSP is supporting women's empowerment by promoting their increased participation in politics and development. Since the legal scope for women in public office was increased, SSP has supported the candidature and election of women from poor and lower-caste sections of the population to institutions of local self-government, as well as to local development committees. This support goes beyond conventional training (information and advice on rights, formal criteria for candidature etc.). Women's groups are required to form strategic alliances and coordinate joint activities with the elected municipal representatives, in order to ensure that development problems really are being addressed from a women's perspective, and that more money and resources are being channelled into pro-poor areas.

4. The frameworks for civil society participation of the poor

The scope for poor people as citizens of their society to obtain a hearing and articulate their interests is to a large extent dependent on conditions that are beyond the scope of their influence or will. Nevertheless there is no clear causal link. Enabling frameworks do not automatically lead to more and improved participation, nor do unfavourable frameworks make all participation impossible from the outset. These are the frameworks within which MISEREOR's actual target groups, and the partner organisations with which MISEREOR cooperates (which are occasionally sometimes part of those target groups), as well as other groups that are significant either for strategic alliances or as opponents, operate. A joint analysis and evaluation of these frameworks by MISEREOR, its partner organisations and target groups is therefore essential, in order to obtain a detailed picture of the conditions affecting civil society participation of the poor, which remains a lasting basic concern.

4.1 Social frameworks

The term "social frameworks" denotes broadly the milieu in which participation can or does take place. In some areas these frameworks are organised, regulated and institutionalised by the state, and in others they exist independently of state organisation.

Economic conditions determine to a high degree the scope for civil society participation. Anyone who lives in great material poverty and has no access to vital resources faces a daily battle for survival that leaves little room for participation in political processes. On the other hand, an executive that does not have its economic base in democratically legitimated fiscal revenues, but in its power of disposal over national resources (rent economy), feels little sense of accountability toward its citizens. In any political system there is a risk that economic power will enter into close, often informal and corrupt relationships with political power – at the expense of citizen participation and economic participation by the majority of the population. Another close relationship between economic and political conditions exists in the context of gender relations. Here, economic and political disadvantage often go hand in hand. Having said that, economic conditions that lead to gaping inequalities in a society can lead to its political legitimacy being called into question, thus generating a strong, albeit often conflictual impetus toward civil society participation.

Cultural factors also play a key role in enabling or disabling civil society participation. This once again becomes strikingly obvious in the gender context, where the ascription of fixed roles makes (usually women's) active participation in public life either more difficult or absolutely impossible. Culturally reinforced borderlines that lead to the exclusion of entire sections of the population can, however, also be tied to numerous other distinguishing features: religious or ethnic affiliation, language, skin colour, place of origin etc. Examples of this include the caste problem in South Asia, or ethnic discrimination in some African countries. Conversely, however, cultural traditions can also strongly support citizen participation, for instance by making peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms available or by ideologically underpinning basic democratic values.

Another important set of frameworks are the sectors relevant to basic social protection such as education, health and nutrition. Education in particular is a key prerequisite for participation in political processes. As with economic frameworks, social frameworks can also work in either of two ways: poor social conditions can have a stifling effect; but they can also nurture civil society participation, for instance when homeless people organise themselves and call to

account those who hold a corresponding public mandate. In MISEREOR's sector-specific project work this is the kind of dynamic we seek to help achieve, and which time and time again our partners succeed in achieving.

Also to be taken into account as an important factor affecting citizen participation are political frameworks. For instance, the understanding of participation in place in a state with a communist tradition will differ from the understanding in place in a (former) military dictatorship. What spaces or forms of articulation for civil society participation exist or are emerging? Is there for instance a tradition of non-governmental organisations already in place in a country? Do groups exist within the government who are more open to participation by civil society than the rest of the government? Another important issue is informal power relations: who holds which key positions of power: influential families, traditional leaders, the military, religious communities, major foreign investors etc.?

4.2 Legal and institutional frameworks

In contrast to social frameworks, legal frameworks are institutionalised and enforceable at a fundamental level. They are more formalised than social frameworks, and as a rule fall within the sphere of the state. This is why they also presuppose in the very first instance a functioning state. The problem of failing states (e.g. Somalia) demonstrates that without a functioning state, it is virtually impossible to guarantee such a framework. Yet even in functioning states a distinction needs to be drawn between existing rights on the one hand, and their enforcement on the other. The rights and institutions that are important for civil society participation include for instance:

- freedom of opinion
- freedom of assembly
- the rule of law (independent judiciary, institutions of state accountability etc.)
- democratic legitimation of the establishment and exercise of state power
- public transparency of relevant information.

A lack of political will, excessive bureaucracy and incompetence on the part of public authorities and the judiciary can, however, undermine such rights that exist at the formal level. Since this is often the case, the protection and enforcement of legal frameworks for civil society participation merits just as much attention as their formal existence. As well as a vigilant civil society, institutions are required to effectively ensure that these frameworks are upheld. It is often helpful when this protection takes place under the eyes of an international public (peer reviews, external election monitoring etc.).

The abuse of public power and authority for personal gain undermines the orientation of legal prescriptions and public institutions toward the common good, thus corrupting the basis for social cohesion. The prevention and control of corruption is therefore one of the key areas of civil society participation. In a corrupt system, formal rights of citizen participation lose their meaning, because they can be evaded at any time.

4.3 External frameworks

As well as the conditions within a country, there are also conditions in place outside it that influence scope for participation. Powerful neighbouring states and regional hegemonic powers can exert considerable political pressure on governments, as a result of which the scope for civil society participation is reduced considerably. The "back yard" policy of the USA in Central and South America is one familiar example of this. Political pressure can, however, also come from within unstable neighbouring countries, e.g. as a result of refugee flows or the risk of local civil wars spreading.

For many developing countries, dependency on multilateral and bilateral donors also has consequences for democracy and civil society participation. During the Cold War period this dependency was used by the respective blocs primarily to protect their own spheres of influence – with largely negative effects on democracy and civil society participation. The picture has since become more complex. On the one hand, good governance has assumed an increasingly prominent role in the shaping of development cooperation among the traditional actors such as World Bank, the EU or the G8. On the other hand donor dominance and political and economic opportunism still determine the picture. As a result many recipient governments are more accountable to their donors than to their own citizens when it comes to policy, and especially economic policy.⁷ Furthermore, in emerging economies such as China, South Africa etc. new actors have emerged as investors and donors for developing countries that so far are barely integrated into the existing international institutions and procedures.

As well as state actors, external private-sector actors can also exert strong influence on opportunities for civil society participation, for instance when corporations operating internationally support undemocratic regimes or local warlords by engaging in corrupt practices. Foreign companies often do play a major and highly untransparent role in the financing of armed conflicts. Conversely, foreign companies and investors are in principle also able to wield their market power in the interest of civil society participation, e.g. by introducing models of co-determination that promise improved social peace, or by complying with international labour rights standards that are expected by the purchasers of their products.

Finally, internationally binding rules and institutions also form an important external framework affecting the scope for citizen participation. The human rights declarations, conventions and institutions of the United Nations and its organisations (e.g. the International Criminal Court) form the backbone of this framework. As at the national level, however, here too it is not only the fact that these external normative frameworks are formally in place, but also whether or not they are protected and upheld that determines the extent to which they actually promote civil society participation. On the other hand, other international regulatory frameworks and institutions can also directly negatively influence scope for participation. This applies especially to instruments promoting the liberalisation of global markets (e.g. Free Trade Agreement and WTO provisions), a side effect of which is often to constrain the scope for poor sections of the population to practice political participation and co-determination.

⁷ The conference in Accra to review implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2-5 September 2008) took first steps to make aid more transparent by facilitating parliamentary oversight and public disclosure of budgets (Accra Agenda for Action, No. 24). Other, albeit less binding obligations were entered into with regard to conditionalities (ibid., No. 25).

Conclusions

- When preparing its country policies, together with its partners MISEREOR should conduct an analysis of the respective frameworks for civil society participation.
- On the basis of this analysis, MISEREOR should clarify its expectations concerning development engagement in a given area, and together with its partners design a strategy for identifying and prioritising points of entry and measures to improve frameworks.
- MISEREOR should clearly specify its own role and those of its partners as well as those of other relevant actors in implementing this strategy. Where possible, MISEREOR should also involve other development cooperation actors (CIDSE member organisations, German governmental and non-governmental organisations etc.) in the analysis and strategic development process.
- Together with its partners and at regular intervals, MISEREOR should conduct an interim review of trends in frameworks for participation, as well as of the effects of its measures in this connection.
- MISEREOR should step up the involvement of partners from the South in its development policy work to improve international frameworks for participation.
- In its education and public relations work, and when communicating with supporters, MISEREOR should point out the importance of frameworks for participation, and thus for pro-poor and pro-self-help development cooperation.

CHAD & CAMEROON – participation in monitoring the pipeline

The Chad-Cameroon pipeline was built, also with World Bank support, in order to transport oil from Chad to the Cameroonian coast and thus reduce poverty in Chad. The project was the subject of controversial debate from the outset. As a result, pressure from the civil society led to various measures being planned in order to reduce negative impacts on the population and the environment. MISEREOR's partners in Chad and Cameroon are participating in monitoring the construction of the pipeline.

In Chad a civil society network supported by MISEREOR is engaged in the oil regions and is making the population in those respective regions aware of the risks and impacts of the oil extraction. The network is working to promote dialogue between the civil society, the government and the oil companies. The network is also working to help bring about improved transparency of oil revenues, respect for the human rights of those affected and the payment of higher compensation to villages affected by the pipeline. MISEREOR is also supporting partners who, in the course of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project, are working to help bring about a more transparent information policy, compensation measures that are fair in size and distribution, and above all a democratic use and oversight of the oil revenues.

In Cameroon, MISEREOR is promoting a non-governmental organisation that is supporting the population in the fight against the negative impacts of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. This NGO is gathering information on whether the agreed compensation payments are actually reaching the affected population in the form and on the scale pledged, documenting damage to the environment, and supporting the local population – with evident success – in negotiating with companies and government agencies. Furthermore, MISEREOR is supporting the Justice and Peace Commission of

the Cameroonian Bishops' Conference, which is implementing a project to train and network partner structures to protect the population's interests in oil extraction in the Gulf of Guinea.

MISEREOR is also working to help its partners articulate their interests and concerns to decision-makers in the North.

To date, the revenues from oil extraction in Chad have failed to generate any impetus for development. On the contrary, since oil extraction began poverty in Chad has continued to worsen, corruption has increased and the political situation has deteriorated. The political opposition is increasingly being put under pressure; human rights violations are once again – following a brief interval of relative improvement – increasing. In Cameroon too, poverty among the people living alongside the pipeline has rather increased, and has resulted in numerous human rights violations.

5. Participation and poverty alleviation – a mutual interrelationship

Participation and democratisation can make a considerable contribution toward poverty reduction. Conversely, alleviating poverty can also improve the scope for participation and the strengthening of democracy. In other words, these two (positive) elements are mutually reinforcing.

Poverty is manifested as a lack of material goods (e.g. food, decent shelter) and access to natural material resources (land, water), as a lack of education and health, and as social marginalisation as a whole. However, poverty is also manifested as a lack of capacity or power on the part of the poor to themselves initiate change. If we adopt a broader understanding of poverty that takes these various dimensions into account, then the inextricable link between participation, democratisation and poverty alleviation becomes clear.

Powerlessness to change the underlying causal structures of poverty is itself in part a result of poverty. Hunger and disease make it more difficult and in some cases even impossible for the poor to find the energy to assert their rights. Lack of education often prevents the poor from finding ways out of poverty, to say nothing of the fact that they often do not even see the causes of poverty because they lack even the time to pause and reflect. This is particularly true of women, who make up the majority of the poor. It is above all poor women who bear an above-average burden of labour, having to earn a living to feed the family, as well as looking after children and performing domestic chores. This burden of labour in itself already prevents many women from playing a role in public life. And if in spite of that they do attempt to do so, they are often confronted with open or covert prejudice.

It is no coincidence that in many contexts, the poor are therefore not at all the agents of self-sustaining and self-reinforcing participatory processes. Due to the fact that their participation in societal and political decision-making processes is made more difficult or impossible, the interests of poor and marginalised sections of the population can more easily be forgotten or ignored. The system that produces and reproduces poverty is thus moved beyond the reach of change. Ultimately the denial of rights of participation leads to an exacerbation of poverty. The stigmatisation that goes hand in hand with poverty keeps a vicious circle in place: others do not ascribe potential for change to the poor, and the poor themselves usually lack the confidence to see that potential for themselves. Society in general and the poor themselves see this as confirming and reinforcing the status quo of their hopeless situation.

Helping to break this vicious circle is a key task of MISEREOR and its partners in the South, who can play an important role here as catalysts and intermediaries: The targeted promotion of measures and processes for participation and democratisation can make a key contribution

to poverty alleviation. It can do so by strengthening target groups' self-help potentials and resource mobilisation capacities, and by breaking down the stigmatisation of their poverty. This can help prevent further processes of impoverishment. By mobilising local funds (e.g. for health and water supply), by fostering a greater overall use of local funds for risk groups, and by promoting women's co-determination and participation in decision-making, this can ultimately influence the social policy of a region or an entire country.

In other words: reducing poverty can help increase participation, while increasing participation can in turn help alleviate poverty. The downward spiral of lack of participation and poverty is reversible. Having said that, no such reversal will be achieved automatically. By gradually overcoming various kinds of symptoms of poverty, resources can be tapped that can be channelled into the strengthening of communities and formation of grass-roots organisations. At this point it becomes possible to address the root causes of poverty, which boosts people's capacity and willingness to participate. Having said that, aid or assistance that aims primarily to address symptoms, and that bears paternalistic traits, can also stifle people's will to help themselves. In the long term this may not only bring about the opposite of poverty alleviation, it may also undermine efforts to promote participation.

Conversely, not every form of organising or utilising scope for participation is suited or geared per se toward helping concretely improve the lives of poor sections of the population. Nor is every form suitable for helping tackle and change the causes of social inequality and injustice. This is why it is important – especially for MISEREOR's target groups – not to accept "offerings" of pseudo-participation, and waste time and energy on them to no ultimate effect. This is because political co-determination is not an end in itself for the poor, but is attached to the hope that they will experience a concrete improvement in their lives.

When civil society participation is oriented toward the goal of self-determined poverty reduction, it becomes necessary to identify both the opportunities and the limits and costs of participation in any given context. Participation costs time and money. This is why agreement needs to be reached early enough as to who is able and willing to make these investments, and on what scale. Professionally managed participation sometimes requires professional expertise. In such cases, how can participation that is both as broad and as professional as possible be brought about? Participation can evoke conflicts. Who will then carry the major risks, and what precautionary measures can be taken for peaceful conflict resolution? MISEREOR and its project partners – and where possible the affected target groups themselves – should raise and answer these questions in order to obtain a clear picture of the scope, nature and direction of participation in specific projects.

Any strategy for participation must ultimately be measured by whether and to what extent it helps bring about visible and perceptible changes in the situation of disadvantaged groups. At the same time this also provides a key criterion for measuring the quality of civil society participation.

Conclusions:

- Together with its partners, MISEREOR should define clear and verifiable agreed objectives for target-group participation in projects. To help ensure that these agreed objectives are appropriate and effective in the given contexts, it would be helpful to analyse the experience gained from success stories and proven best practices, in order to develop practicable criteria.

- Together with its project partners, MISEREOR should in each concrete case assess the extent to which the promotion of civil society participation in political processes and decision-making can contribute toward the project-specific goal of poverty alleviation. On that basis, clear and verifiable objectives should be developed and agreed on with the project partners.
- In regular cross-sectoral evaluations, MISEREOR should review the effectiveness of measures to promote civil society participation in terms of their contribution to poverty alleviation. This will permit continuous improvement of the instruments for promoting participation.

BRAZIL – Monitoring of public budgets by civil society in the State of Bahia

In the state of Bahia in the northeast of **Brazil** a network of organisations has emerged that is studying in detail the legal options for monitoring the use of public funds. The network first emerged from the work of various MISEREOR partners who were providing training and capacity development inputs to grass-roots organisations, enabling them to influence local infrastructural and social policy, and monitor public budgets. Training courses are now being implemented in Bahia to enable local experts to compare municipal revenues and expenditure with budget plans, and audit invoices and vouchers. If regulations governing the correct use of public funds are breached, legal action can be taken that can lead to prosecution, removal from office of those responsible, reimbursement of the embezzled funds etc. The network of MISEREOR partners is now raising awareness of the possibility of budget control across the entire state of Bahia, and is systematising the results of the monitoring activities conducted in numerous districts.

It remains the case that the extremely slow handling of proceedings within the Brazilian legal system and the lack of political will at higher levels mean that final, legally binding decisions are still outstanding. Yet it is undeniable that the activities of the grass-roots organisations in the districts concerned have sent out public signals that should not be underestimated. On the one hand, this means that officials must now feel that they are being monitored, and are no longer able to enrich themselves without inhibition. On the other hand, individuals and groups are now discovering that they need not look on and stand back powerless as a small few enrich themselves at society's expense. They are discovering that there are now ways of tackling such a deplorable state of affairs. It has thus become possible here to improve the availability of financial resources for urgently needed social and infrastructure measures by monitoring the use of funds. At the same time, this has been combined with the concrete experience of using instruments of the rule of law, and thus of strengthening the vitality of democracy.

Alongside this work, however, the challenge remains of helping draft constructive policy proposals at municipal level, and ensuring that the interests of poor sections of the population are respected by the corresponding municipal councils. There are also further options for pro-actively influencing public infrastructure and social policy. These include participation in the annual preparation of municipal and state budget plans, and the preparation every four years of the respective budget framework plans. In other municipalities, election monitoring committees are being established. The latter example in particular demonstrates how important it is for a well organised civil society to remain actively engaged in supporting compliance with basic rules of democracy. When manipulated, elections – a cornerstone of representative democracy – can be misused as a hegemonic tool by regional oligarchies. The scope for manipulation and the abuse of power can, however, be greatly reduced in the long run by applying the aforementioned tools of civil society control - especially when this work is combined with good information, education and communication work.

6. Participation and the division of roles between the state and civil society

6.1 The role of the state

Recent trends in international law draw a distinction in the obligations of states between obligations to respect, obligations to protect and obligations to fulfil. According to the UN interpretation, these relate both to political and civil, and to economic, social and cultural (ESC) human rights. States thus bear the main responsibility for upholding human rights. This responsibility can also extend to territories beyond their own national borders. This occurs for instance when states monitor compliance with human rights standards by national companies operating abroad, or when they monitor international institutions of which they are members.

With respect to the ESC rights, the obligations of states to uphold human rights can ultimately be understood as a way of making possible decent living conditions for all. Concerning political and social rights, we can see the obligations of states as embodying the responsibility to create, maintain and protect the frameworks within which the rule of law, democracy and participation are possible.

The non-fulfilment of these obligations by states can assume various dimensions that may extend as far as total disrespect for or negation of the rule of law.

6.2 The role of civil society

However, it is not the state alone, but society too, which is to say the sum total of all individuals, who are responsible for creating social justice. If this is the case, then equality of opportunity and the universal right of participation in societal processes become especially important. This presupposes that all those who are affected by certain decisions participate in them. This is the only way in which the goal of efforts to achieve justice can be realised, by enabling people to assume responsibility and act accordingly. The increasingly complex and untransparent links between political and economic relationships at the national and international level represent a particular challenge in this context.

Civil society should not perform the tasks of the state or relieve the state of its responsibility; it should call upon the state to discharge its obligations. Furthermore, civil society groups can become voluntarily engaged as citizens and assume tasks within the polity, provided that the responsibility of the state on the one hand, and the freedom of civil society engagement on the other are protected and upheld. In development cooperation in particular, with its numerous actors (multilateral institutions, bilateral cooperation between governments and their implementing organisations, foundations and funds, private-sector organisations and projects, non-governmental organisations) and links, it is important to clearly define and distinguish roles.

The debate on implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (March 2005), aspects of which have now been incorporated into the Accra Agenda for Action (September 2008), has provided important clarification on this point. Governments from the North and South have now acknowledged civil society organisations "as independent development actors in their own right", emphasising the complementarity of their efforts to those of governments and the private sector. They have also undertaken to "work with CSOs to provide an enabling environment that maximises their contributions to development".⁸

⁸ Ibid., No. 20. The full wording reads: "We will deepen our engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector. ... We will work with CSOs to provide an enabling environment that maximises their contributions to development."

For MISEREOR, this independence from state and private-sector actors is a key basis for its own work and the work of its project partners. This is because the development approach based on mobilising the potentials of the poor and on their active participation can only become effective if the agents of that process are free from the influence of external political or economic interests. This does not in principle exclude coordination or cooperation with external actors, or the use of public or private funds. With regard to exchange and cooperation for instance with implementing organisations of governmental development assistance (ODA), opportunities for a concerted approach to promote civil society participation can arise, and MISEREOR should utilise these. With regard to financial inputs, when public or private funds are accepted a guarantee must be in place that the donors are in agreement with MISEREOR's goals and methods.

As the following rather general categorisation is designed to demonstrate, there are very many different ways of defining the relationship between the state and civil society. In each case these create various challenges for political practice, and not least for the work of MISEREOR. It should always be remembered too that states are never organised on an entirely homogeneous basis. It is thus often the case that different opportunities and degrees of scope for civil society participation arise at different points within the system (e.g. in certain ministries or offices) or at various levels (local, regional, central). These can be utilised in different ways.

It is extremely difficult to call upon failing or failed states to fulfil their obligations, because there are often no addressees to approach who could be called to account. Participation in this context means forming and strengthening civil society organisations to press ahead with restoring the rule of law, and with developing basic institutions to organise and regulate society.

In dictatorships, repressive states or states with major democratic deficits, a critical civil society often faces persecution (often involving the use of extremely brutal methods, human rights abuses and an utter disregard for the rule of law). Here we cannot speak of civil society participation (first of all because in most cases civil society *de facto* does not exist, and secondly because if it did it would then be suspected of collaboration). In dictatorships and repressive states, the role of civil society toward the state is one of resistance and the organisation of spaces for the struggle to bring about democracy.

In states with major democratic deficits, this role is one of opposition which, depending on the willingness of the organs of the state to engage in dialogue, may begin to move toward a critical and constructive dialogue for greater democracy.

In more or less well functioning formal and representative democracies, civil society can point out democratic shortcomings, and remain vigilant to ensure that democratic rights are not undermined (e.g. creeping erosion of the freedom of opinion). It can perform a monitoring role during elections, or to ensure the proper use of public funds (anti-corruption etc.). Civil society participation can take the direction of cooperation with the state or co-involvement in shaping the "res publica".⁹ It may for instance be manifested in more or less direct lobbying of political parties and parliamentary work. And it may include various mechanisms to influence political projects (constitutional reforms), to promote budgets at local, regional and national level (participatory budgets), and to shape social policy (e.g. within the scope of PRSP processes).

⁹ "Participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his civic role with and for others, but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system." (Compendium, No. 190). According to this view, participation is the condition of the possibility of democracy, while conversely "...every democracy must be participative" (ibid.).

This is where the boundaries between state and civil society action often become blurred, and a tendency toward the overlapping of roles and responsibilities arises. In political systems of this type this is true especially since civil society actors often switch to public office (and occasionally vice versa). Yet here too, the aforementioned principle of fundamental state responsibility must remain operative.

In practice, examples of participatory democracy tend to be found rather at the local or municipal level. Here, civil society should be careful not to confuse its own role with that of the state. No matter how closely certain objectives may converge, civil society should keep its distance and play a critical, corrective role. Another important dimension of the differentiated relationship between the state and civil society is the distinction between the local, regional, national and international levels. This is of major concrete and practical importance in MISEREOR's work. It affects both project and process promotion, networking, decentralisation, North-South and South-South exchange, and participation in international alliances, as well as lobbying and advocacy work in Germany and the EU etc. Since the aforementioned levels are interdependent, practical work often relates to more than one dimension at the same time.

Typical questions concerning the relationship between the state and civil society can only be answered properly by relating them to the various contexts listed above. These include questions concerning the legitimacy and representativity of civil society organisations, financial dependencies and their significance, individuals switching from NGOs to government or administrative offices or vice versa, or concerning the boundaries between independent NGOs and QUANGOs (Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations).

VIETNAM – Formal and informal civil society

In the Socialist Republic of **Vietnam**, the term "civil society" has long been understood officially to refer exclusively to the *mass organisations* (the Vietnam Women's Union, the Farmers' Union and the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour etc.) organised under the umbrella of the Vietnam Fatherland Front. Yet other organisations such as the Red Cross, the umbrella organisation of the 17,000 state cooperatives, professional associations etc. also form part of civil society. This heterogeneous grouping also includes the armed forces and the Communist Party. Consequently, civil society participation means that the interests e.g. of the farmers in a village can be represented at the Fatherland Front not only through the elected representatives of the people, but also through the Farmers' Union. To some extent the role of the Fatherland Front is then to reconcile divergent interests - under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Since the country opened up in the 1980s, however, Vietnamese NGOs (VNGOs) have increasingly been emerging. These are organised under the umbrella of professional associations in the research and education sectors, which in turn are members of the Fatherland Front. Against this background, we can speak of autonomous or genuine civil society organisations only in a very limited sense. In recent years MISEREOR has increasingly been promoting these NGOs, because both they and international NGOs (INGOs) have been helping create local informal groups such as savings and credit cooperatives, integrated pest management (IPM) clubs and the like.

Most of these informal groups, of which there are hundreds of thousands in Vietnam, arose independently of VNGOs and INGOs, however. These informal groups are found in the sports, culture and leisure sectors, but also in areas directly relevant to development such as agricultural or artisanal production and marketing, water user groups and the like. These groups make up a substantial part of the civil society, though this has been far from adequately acknowledged, either by the state or by donors. The Grassroot Democracy Decree of July 2003 for the first time created wider scope for stronger participation at municipal and village levels, not least by these groups. At

the same time, certain decision-making competences for infrastructure and public welfare institutions were delegated down to these levels. And as the number and strength of informal groups at the local level have increased, national processes have been initiated that are generating pressure for wider participation.

As the example of Vietnam demonstrates, in states with democratic deficits we should not be aiming solely to achieve formal participation. We should also be thinking about and supporting diverse forms of non-institutionalised, informal participation in different areas of society.

6.3 Conclusions – MISEREOR's options for intervention

To promote civil society participation of the poor in the various contexts of the state, MISEREOR can intervene at the levels of the three frameworks outlined above (see Sections 4.1 to 4.3). Various aspects of MISEREOR's status as a Church-based development agency also create additional scope. These include the density and grass-roots base of Church structures, the professionalism and expertise of our local partners, and the recognition by society and the state that local Churches often enjoy. This status also creates special challenges, however. These result from historical factors, links between local Churches and local power politics, the suspicion that a missionary agenda may be at work, or a poor definition and division of roles between the state, the Church, other religious communities and the civil society.

Intervention in the sphere of the social frameworks: The social sectors of education, health, basic services, shelter etc. are a traditional point of entry for development cooperation. Through the measures promoted in these sectors, MISEREOR can at the same time strengthen the participation of actors both in the projects themselves, and in the specific political processes relevant to them. The key instruments here are material inputs, training and organisational development for the project partners. Another important instrument can be political dialogue, designed to achieve coordinated political advocacy work in the North and the South. Economic, cultural and political frameworks also offer scope for participation, albeit less so than those sectors that generate direct social impacts. Examples include microfinance systems, awareness raising among ethnic minorities or truth commissions following phases of repression.

Intervention in the sphere of the legal and institutional frameworks: Even more so than in the case of social frameworks, interventions in this sphere take place through competent civil society partners (including Church-based partners). Examples include human rights work, election monitoring and democratisation, control of and participation in public budgets, and local radio stations. Here too, the instruments are material inputs, training and organisational development, along with political dialogue. Since the target groups in this sphere are usually not themselves the agents of the measures, the interface between them and the implementing NGOs is especially important: Are the Legal Holders, are those implementing the measures sufficiently well informed on the situation and needs of their target groups? Are they making an effort to promote active participation by the target groups? Are their decision-making processes and measures transparent to their target groups, and are they accountable to them?

Intervention in the sphere of the external frameworks: Promoting civil society participation of poor and disadvantaged sections of the population by improving external frameworks is largely a matter of political advocacy work. This work normally takes place within the framework of large national and international networks (action alliances, umbrella organisations, campaigns etc.). Its effectiveness and quality depend largely inter alia on close harmonisation

and coordination of the objectives and measures with the target groups and partner organisations.

Partner dialogue: Dialogue with project partners is crucially important in MISEREOR's work. This is the joint route by which we not only prepare and implement concrete measures for participation, but also help enable target groups to practice participation as effectively as possible. An ability and willingness to engage in dialogue are therefore key criteria by which MISEREOR must continuously review and orient its work.

In partner dialogue frameworks are evaluated, and measures adjusted. It is essential here to also take into account the specific situations and mindsets of the respective partner organisations. In some situations proper participation requires special expertise, which perhaps first has to be acquired. Material aspects such as the provision of means of transport and communication play just as important a role as institutional aspects such as dependencies on government agencies, or organisational form. Some partner organisations themselves have participation deficits. This can result for instance from the dominance of a charismatic founding personality, traditional gender imbalances or strictly hierarchical decision-making structures. Participation is a process, and the search for the appropriate instruments and measures is already part of this process. This search itself must be participatory and open to improvement and progress. It must remain so even though this may repeatedly lead to conflicts and compromises between MISEREOR's expectations of participation and the partner's immediate project objectives.

As Christians we believe that a just global development which, in the interests of all, and especially the poor and marginalised, is oriented toward the principles of justice, peace and integrity of Creation, is a lasting task. And it is a task in which people can experience their own comprehensive human development. At the same time it is a space for communication, joint endeavour, joint learning and joint celebration, in which we already begin to experience the goal toward which we are heading.

Annex: The history of this discussion paper

MISEREOR's Thematic Group on Participation has existed since April 2004. Though there have been occasional changes of personnel, all three continental departments (Africa, Asia and Latin America), and the Development Policy Department, have been permanently represented within the group since its foundation. A representative of the Evaluation and Quality Management Department was also permanently associated with the group as a resource person.

From the very beginning, the members of the Thematic Group were convinced that the goals of the discussion paper could only be achieved by building on the lessons learned and suggestions provided by our partners.

These were documented in the guidelines entitled "Promoting citizen participation in public budgeting. Recommendations for MISEREOR's project work" (2003)¹⁰, and in the cross-sectoral analysis by Stefanie Keienburg (2005)¹¹ commissioned by the Thematic Group. Finally, in the late summer/autumn of 2006 we launched an attempt to utilise the Internet as a forum for discussion¹² of these issues with our partners. A total of 29 of MISEREOR's partners from Africa (2), Asia (9), Latin America (16), the Middle East (1) and Oceania (1) took part, most of whom we had written to beforehand. Not as many partners participated in the forum as we would have liked, nor was the participation as balanced or as interactive as we would have wished. Nevertheless the weblog did produce a number of inputs, examples and discussion material for the further process of preparing this discussion paper.

A draft list of contents was drawn up in spring 2006, on the basis of which the main topics of the paper were prepared by individual members of the Thematic Group, and discussed by the entire group. Based on this a first version of the paper was produced, which was then discussed once again as a whole in conjunction with the results of the weblog at a closed meeting of the group. Following several editorial phases, a version was then produced for discussion in-house: it was discussed in the departments for Latin America (16/10/07), Development Policy (04/12/07), Asia (11/12/07) and Africa (17/12/07), and at an open round of discussion (18/12/07). A slightly revised version of the same text was also discussed at an expert meeting (21/04/08) with external guests from governmental and non-governmental development cooperation, and the university sector.

The present text is the result of these discussions and consultations.

¹⁰ Promoting citizen participation in public budgeting. Recommendations for MISEREOR's project work, Aachen: MISEREOR, German original 2002, English translation 2003.

¹¹ Only available in German. See: Stefanie Keienburg, *Zivilgesellschaftliche Beteiligung in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Eine Querschnittsanalyse von Projektbeispielen aus Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika* [Civil society participation in development cooperation. A cross-sectoral analysis of project examples from Africa, Asia and Latin America], Aachen: MISEREOR (manuscript) 2005.

¹² See: <http://www.MISEREOR.org/index.php>.