

Conclusions from the Vocational Training Sector Portfolio Evaluation

Evaluation of the MISEREOR sector portfolio in the vocational training sector

Brief description of the project-implementing organisations and the evaluated projects

This sector portfolio evaluation took place between September 2014 and November 2015 and was conducted in three phases: (1) a desk phase (document study), which presented a global overview of 106 vocational training projects at MISEREOR and a description of the sector portfolio; (2) a field phase, during which key lines of inquiry were explored in depth by evaluating a total sample of 20 projects carried out by 17 organisations in Brazil, Ethiopia and India; and (3) a synthesis phase, in which the results from the first two phases were assessed comprehensively.

The projects covered by the evaluation were those which met MISEREOR's criteria for formal or non-formal vocational training. They were approved between 2007 and 2009, received project funding ranging from a minimum of € 25,000 up to a maximum amount of € 810,000, and were formally concluded as of the interrogation date of 1 August 2014. 106 projects met these criteria, although many of these projects incorporated activities in other areas (such as general promotion of young people, women or employment) in addition to vocational training approaches. Because a small number of project partners received MISEREOR support for several project phases during the funding period, the term "project" can also equate to one of several project phases belonging to the same programme or partner. Thus the population of interest for the evaluation comprised 97 project partners in total.

Out of the 106 projects that made up the population of interest for the evaluation, Africa accounted for 54 projects in 19 countries, Asia for 40 projects in 17 countries, and Latin America for 12 projects in three countries. This reflects that vocational training was not a promotion priority in Latin America during the period under evaluation.

As in other sectors, in the field of vocational training MISEREOR primarily works with development cooperation partners from a Church-based, Christian or faith-based context. In 72 per cent of cases these are organisations with close links to the Catholic or Christian Church (dioceses, parishes, Salesians, Jesuits, other Christian orders, CARITAS, etc.). 28 per cent of cases involve non-state organisations with a faith-based background (e.g. Buddhists, Muslims) or recognised social work with excluded target

groups. Responsibility for around one-third of projects carried out by Church-based agencies rests with local dioceses or archdioceses, while 18 per cent are in the hands of Salesians. Jesuits and national CARITAS associations are also statistically relevant. MISEREOR has built up long-standing partnerships with most of these agencies, sometimes going back to the 1980s or earlier. Only 18 per cent of projects are being carried out by new agencies, where the durability of the cooperation remains to be proven.

The partners visited and projects analysed during the field study cover a wide spectrum of different organisations and approaches. Common to them all is a relatively broad understanding of vocational training. In addition to occupational skills, efforts are made to improve general opportunities for development and integration of young people who are otherwise barely reached by offers of vocational training. For the majority of projects the long-term goal is stated in terms of improving income or the target groups' economic situation. In a few cases, the goal refers to the general improvement of living conditions or the integration of excluded groups. Two projects explicitly mention improving the framework conditions for vocational training as a development goal.

Essentially the projects' target groups are socially disadvantaged people, the majority being youths and young adults, both from rural and urban areas. A few projects support the poor population in general, whereas others are addressed to specific groups within the population, e.g. prostitutes, female domestic workers, child workers, street children, dropouts and ex-convicts. Women and men are equally represented on average. Much of the teaching takes place in co-educational and interfaith settings.

During the field phase, the approaches examined in Ethiopia were the following:

- a Church-based legal holder in Addis Ababa with an urban development programme, within which women are placed on vocational training programmes run by other agencies;
- an NGO that offers short courses, life-skills training and small grants to assist former prostitutes to enter self-employment;
- a diocesan-run trade and agricultural college in the north of the country;
- a Church-based agency's development centre which is specifically addressed to women and offers vocational training, among other activities;
- a training and community centre in the west of the country, likewise run by a Church-based agency.

The organisations and projects analysed in Brazil were:

- an NGO carrying out a promotion and training programme for street children and unemployed people in periurban settlements of the Recife conurbation;
- a centre for the social integration of former prostitutes and street girls in Pernambuco;
- a rural community development project in Ceará that includes some vocational training courses in its programme;
- a children's and young people's circus project for former street children, run by an NGO in Rio de Janeiro;
- an NGO-run advisory project for rural community development in Piauí, which includes some vocational training elements.

In India the following organisations and projects were studied in more detail:

- a central fund for the promotion of non-formal vocational training approaches, which supports around 90 organisations in the whole of India, generally small NGOs in rural areas, offering a variety of vocational training courses;
- an NGO in Bangalore carrying out a programme of vocational training for rural youths from lower castes;
- another NGO in Karnataka, which offers vocational training as part of a rural development programme;
- an integral youth promotion programme run by a local NGO in Gujarat, which contains a vocational training component;
- a programme for former child workers run by a Church-based agency, which provides vocational training courses as well as basic education;
- an NGO in Orissa which offers vocational training activities for young people as part of a violence prevention and rehabilitation scheme;
- a foundation in India which supports domestic employees with education and self-organisation, and which sporadically also has vocational training courses in its programme.

MISEREOR supports its partners in various ways. Sometimes it supports all of the partners' activities in certain priority areas, and sometimes only selected partner measures. For example, 23 projects (22%) out of the population of interest were purely construction or equipment projects (i.e. MISEREOR financed the construction or equipment of vocational training centres), and eight projects were solely dedicated to staff training or capacity building of partners in the vocational training sector, e.g. by financing further training programmes for vocational trainers or funding curriculum development

measures. In strategic terms the focus of promotion is on non-formal and integrated vocational training approaches (75% of the projects). Formal vocational training only accounts for a small share of the projects (4%), and dual approaches play an equally minor role (5%).

Objectives of the evaluation and methodological approach

The objective of the evaluation was, on the one hand, to work jointly with the MISEREOR partner organisations to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches in the vocational training sector, so that conclusions could be drawn for MISEREOR's promotion strategy. On the other hand, MISEREOR conducted the evaluation for the purposes of its accountability to the public and to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for the funds spent in the vocational training sector.

First, the quantitative assessment of the 106 projects in the population of interest was carried out according to agreed criteria. In addition, during the desk phase 35 projects were subjected to in-depth analysis, and 15 evaluation reports involving analysis of a total of 18 projects were reviewed. In the three field-study countries, 12 partner organisations were visited in situ and their vocational training approaches examined intensively; six further partners were included in the evaluation process by means of written questionnaires and participation in workshops; furthermore, eight of the Indian fund's partner organisations were visited in person and 33 were surveyed in writing. During the subsequent synthesis phase, the results of the desk phase were compared with the results from the field phase and assessed with reference to the DAC criteria (relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability). Building on this, overarching conclusions and recommendations were developed.

The evaluation was understood as a collective learning process. Both MISEREOR and the partner organisations in situ were involved in all steps of the preparation and implementation. The spectrum of methods comprised:

- analysis of documents at MISEREOR and in situ (including analysis of the available statistical data on individuals completing vocational training);
- a written questionnaire-survey and personal interviews with representatives of the partner organisations;
- individual and focus-group interviews with course participants, training completers, trainers, and representatives of relevant government and non-governmental project-executing organisations and from the private sector;
- written interviews with selected course participants and completers;
- field trips to partner organisations and training establishments;

- one workshop at both the beginning and the end of the field phase for consultation, information and recording of the results, with participation from representatives of the partner organisations and of other sectorally relevant organisations and institutions (civil society, governmental, private sector).

The evaluation was carried out by an interdisciplinary team of experts with a core group of two women and two men, who brought experience in vocational training, promotion of young people, promotion of women, urban and rural development, and quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, and were supported by an extended team of international experts. In situ the international experts called upon local experts from different disciplines, selecting the appropriate mix of women and men as well as different specialisations. A total of 11 individual experts were involved in the evaluation, of which five were women. The evaluation and its individual steps and interim results were coordinated with the accompanying facilitation team at MISEREOR. In a final workshop, the overall results of the evaluation were presented and discussed with representatives of MISEREOR, Bread for the World and BMZ.

Assessment of the sector portfolio with reference to DAC criteria



Relevance

All projects reach target groups which need particular support and are often denied access to existing offers of (formal) vocational training. In order to make their offers accessible to these groups, MISEREOR's partners offer mainly short-duration courses at a relatively low level of vocational training. Social and life skills are taught in addition to occupational competences. Seen in relation to the means and resources available to MISEREOR, the total number of beneficiaries reached (approx. 40,000 to 45,000 participants per year) is remarkable.

On the national level many of the projects fill a strategic gap; they show how target groups which have previously been excluded from the state vocational training system can be reached. MISEREOR's activities are also significant in the international context, particularly in view of the fact that international donors are trying harder to exploit the potential of vocational training for poverty reduction. MISEREOR's partner organisations contribute to the improvement of vocational training for marginalised and poor sections of the population, e.g. in the context of the informal sector, and adapt their provision to the needs and priorities of the specific target groups. Many of MISEREOR's partners could serve as a model for integrated, holistic approaches; dissemination of their experience is not standard practice, however.

All partners include cross-sectoral themes in their work. Attention is paid to gender equity in particular, and to human rights, participation and conflict transformation. Even if the course offering still often serves traditional gender roles, evidence has been found of very positive effects for equal opportunities simply by enabling women to train in an occupation and earn an income of their own.

Effects

On the micro level the projects achieve a positive contribution to employment promotion, and to improving life prospects and income. Practice- and market-oriented approaches, in particular, achieve high employment rates. Most participants feel better integrated into society as a result of the training. Dropouts are motivated to return to school. The projects build self-reliance, self-confidence, autonomy and personal stability among the participants, particularly among women and in relation to their status within the family. By broadly supporting local networks such as savings groups and cooperatives, and by linking in with state measures for small and micro-business promotion and social protection, these effects could be amplified further still.

Very few projects attempt to exert influence on the framework conditions for vocational training, although work on this aspect holds out great potential. In the three countries of the field phase, for example, the public sector aspires to make vocational training accessible even for marginalised groups. Here the partner organisations would be in a position to raise awareness in state bodies about how to deal with disadvantaged groups, and could pass on their experience with a view to opening up vocational training systems to these target groups.

Effectiveness

As far as could be established, the projects reviewed in the desk and field phases largely fulfilled their objectives. The envisaged target groups have been reached, with a particular focus on girls and women, who are often underrepresented in vocational training. Basic skills are being taught which foster personality development and create the prerequisites for integration into society and the job market. More broadly the training is instilling values and motivation to work for social transformation. The projects are making a contribution to improving living conditions and to increasing income.

Regarding the quality of the training, some areas with scope for improvement were identified. These concern premises and equipment, in-service training of trainers, market orientation, and supplementary offers to prepare people for self-employment or the

(informal) market. The latter is especially important for many women who have to combine employment with their duties in the household. The quality of the training is rated as acceptable overall, however.

Very few partner organisations are accredited or have their courses certified. As a result it is not always possible for the participants to proceed to other further training programmes afterwards. That said, accreditation is not always worthwhile because it can lead to increased costs and exclusion of the target group. Cooperation with state and private-sector institutions is in need of improvement. This might enable wider dissemination of experience and achieve better broad-scale effectiveness of the extremely important integrated approaches.

Efficiency

The costs per beneficiary are comparatively low. Many partner organisations try to use the limited resources as efficiently as possible, e.g. through flexible timetables and good maintenance of infrastructure. In some cases cooperation with state and private-sector actors would increase efficiency; by making joint use of infrastructure, for example. Many partners also lack any system for monitoring costs per beneficiary or for outcome and impact monitoring.

Sustainability

For completers of vocational training on an individual level, the projects certainly have lasting effects by empowering people to advance social and societal developments. In many cases the beneficiaries learn to operate in a variety of contexts and to adapt to the constantly changing labour market. Some of the partner organisations are developing new and up-to-date course contents in order to respond flexibly to market demand. However, the shortage of resources often makes it difficult to incorporate new technologies. This can hinder the sustainability of learning.

The partner organisations are increasingly developing strategies to diversify their incomes so as to be less dependent upon donor financing. Their possibilities for boosting their own incomes through course fees or product sales are limited, however. Nevertheless, a few examples highlight opportunities for diversifying their income further, through activities such as advisory services, joint use of rooms and tools by several agencies, cross-subsidisation from better-off participants, and state and private funding. Better diffusion of the approaches may also stabilise institutional sustainability. The more recognition the agencies

receive as institutions of integrated vocational training, the more demand there will be for their offers. There is certainly no prospect of complete independence from external subsidies in the vocational training sector, however.

Findings and recommendations for the sector portfolio

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in the significance of vocational training in international development cooperation. An understanding is gaining ground whereby vocational training is an integral and comprehensive approach which does not focus solely on the transfer of occupational competences but also considers the entire pathway to employment and asks what competences young people need in order to thrive in working and social life. Especially in the context of MISEREOR promotion aimed at a target group of young people from situations of poverty or other difficult life situations, support is necessary in the form of better basic education, vocational orientation, life-skills training or job-entry coaching, in order to enable marginalised young people to access the job market.

Vocational training is also steadily rising in status in the national education systems of many developing countries. Non-state offers of vocational training as provided by MISEREOR partners complement the state systems by enabling excluded target groups to access offers of training and the job market. For important as it may be to standardise access conditions, quality requirements and curricula in the state system, standardisation also harbours an intrinsic risk of excluding poorer target groups from the vocational training sector. It is problematic, for example, that a secondary school leaving certificate is normally required in order to access formal offers of vocational training. This is something that large numbers of young people from poor and marginalised target groups do not have. For this reason, many MISEREOR partners work in the non-formal and informal sector of vocational training and adapt their offers to the target group's actual level of qualification.

The vocational training sector portfolio accounts for quite a small share of MISEREOR's work. In 2013 it made up approximately 3.6% of the total funding volume of EUR 187.7 million. The majority of MISEREOR funding is made available by BMZ through the Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid (KZE); MISEREOR's contribution from its own resources amounts to 21%. In the context of German state promotion of vocational training, however, MISEREOR's contribution is not insignificant; in 2013 it accounted for approximately 7.5% of BMZ's funding volume for vocational training.

During the desk phase, the evaluation team had defined projects as vocational training projects if their main objective consisted of improving the vocational training of young

people or adults and teaching the specialist competences necessary for a particular occupational profile, whether in a formal, non-formal or informal vocational training context. Another factor that emerged during the field phase, however, was the considerable importance of prevocational activities. Initially these do not teach specific occupational competences but prepare young people to take up vocational training offers or to integrate into the job market in the long term. They may range from measures to improve basic education (in many countries a tenth grade leaving certificate is the prerequisite for participation in vocational training programmes), to elements of vocational orientation or prevocational training, life-skills training and social orientation, promotion of important key qualifications for employment and the labour market (“soft skills” such as punctuality, discipline, organisation, appearance, communication skills and confidence), or modular technical, computer or language courses. Often young people affected by poverty or difficult life situations only gain access to vocational training itself via this preparatory route.

In addition, the coaching of successful course completers as they negotiate the pathway into first employment is an equally important element of occupational promotion. Therefore, in the context of poverty and underprivilege, it is important to consider not only the core task of specialist vocational training but also the different support outputs that are necessary for young people in transition from school to the labour market. Looking at vocational training from this perspective, there are bound to be overlaps with measures for employment and micro-business promotion, basic education, and the general promotion of young people or women. The higher-order objective of sustainably improving the target groups’ employment and income situation, and hence their living conditions, is at the forefront, rather than vocational training as an exclusive objective or an end in itself.

The evaluation team recommends to MISEREOR that, in the aim of integral promotion of each given target group, it should do more to embed the conceptual strategy of the sector portfolio in dialogue with its partners and to disseminate existing experience and lessons learned. At the same time, a broader orientation towards the “promotion of competences for the labour market” would be useful. In addition, MISEREOR can support the partner organisations in the following areas: carrying out market studies, strengthening strategies for integration with the local economy, in-service training of trainers, systematising and disseminating lessons learned and tried-and-tested strategies, networking and lobbying, and developing strategies for the diversification of income. MISEREOR should also continue to make funding available for infrastructure and equipment and to support the partners in carrying out more effective monitoring. Furthermore, MISEREOR should make efforts to disseminate positive

experience on the system level so as to raise awareness about target-group orientation and integral approaches among other implementing organisations in German or international development cooperation.

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The results of the evaluation were discussed internally at MISEREOR and with BMZ. The key points are the following:

MISEREOR partners have flexible strategies, which are especially appropriate for enabling access to training and improved life prospects when working with disadvantaged people. However, there is too little clarity about the distinguishing characteristics of vocational training overall and where exactly measures like improved basic education, occupational orientation, life-skills training or job-entry coaching fit in to vocational training. Experience gained from our partners' work is not being sufficiently disseminated, despite the fact that state institutions might find it beneficial, since they often lack appropriately adapted strategies for disadvantaged people.

MISEREOR has therefore decided to create an orientation framework describing the vocational training sector portfolio with its specific characteristics and the orientation towards the "promotion of competences for the labour market". This vocational training strategy should explicitly incorporate the flexibility that has made the partners' work so successful until now.

With regard to improving their concrete approaches to vocational training, it has become clear that partners should improve their (labour-) market orientation as well as the monitoring and steering of measures. For this reason, in parallel to the orientation framework a manual will be prepared which gives support to country officers and partners, e.g. in producing market studies or developing a planning and monitoring system

With reference to the dissemination of our partners' flexible vocational training strategies focused on disadvantaged groups, MISEREOR itself is seeking more dialogue with state development cooperation, other civil society organisations and, above all, its own in-country vocational training partners, which were not

analysed as part of the sector portfolio evaluation. In concrete terms, a presentation of results is planned for 2016 at the BMZ “Team Vocational Training” multi-stakeholder forum (involving BMZ, implementation organisations and civil society) as well as a discussion with partners in Kenya and Democratic Republic of Congo. The recommendations on “strengthening relationships with the local economy and local businesses” and (improved) “market analysis instruments and monitoring systems”, in particular, should be discussed in the partner countries.

Translation from the German:
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Strategies for Occupational Promotion¹



¹ Joanna Kotowski et al.: Evaluierung des Förderbereichs Berufliche Bildung des Hilfswerks MISEREOR e. V., Synthesebericht [Evaluation of the vocational training sector portfolio at the development agency MISEREOR, synthesis report] p.6, Wiesbaden/Offenbach, 14 December 2015

Diagram of cause-and-effect correlations

