

Summary of the meta-evaluation of evaluations commissioned by partner organisations completed in 2016-2020

Object of the evaluation, methodology and process

[Misereor](#) is the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation. Misereor does not implement development projects itself, but provides technical and financial support to independent partner organisations to implement their projects. Together with its partner organisations in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Oceania and Latin America, Misereor aims to help people help themselves. The projects of Misereor's partner organisations support people all around the world, regardless of their faith, culture or skin colour.

Misereor uses two distinct procedures in order to evaluate individual projects: either the legal holder itself commissions an expert consultant to conduct an external evaluation, or Misereor and the partner organisation together commission an evaluation. Within the framework of this evaluation system, evaluations are carried out each year of at least 10% of the projects supported through public funding and of at least 10% of the projects in excess of EUR 100,000 funded through donations.

This meta-evaluation conducted in 2020 was concerned with all evaluations commissioned by partner organisations and completed in the years 2016 to 2020. During this period of time, a total of 360 evaluations of this kind were commissioned and conducted. From this population, the evaluation team picked and assessed a random sample of 64 evaluations from the three continental departments.

Starting at the beginning of November 2021, the 64 evaluation reports were analysed using eight criteria (see table below). In addition, an online survey was conducted among 109 individuals in December, including 49 Misereor staff concerned with the evaluations, 39 partner organisation representatives and 21 expert consultants. In January 2022, eight Misereor staff members were interviewed in more detail during telephone calls and four workshops were held in the respective project regions with a total of 31 attendees from 27 partner organisations.

Results

On a scale from 1 (very good) to 6 (insufficient), 81% of evaluations (52) received an overall rating between 1 and 2.99 and the remaining 19% (12 evaluations) received an overall rating between 3 and 3.99. The following table shows the overall ratings of all evaluations per continent for each of the eight criteria.

Table: overall rating of 64 evaluations using eight criteria

	Africa / Middle East	Asia	Latin America	Average
1 Participation/involvement of the target groups	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.0
2 Impartiality and independence	2.2	2.6	3.0	2.6
3 Accuracy and credibility	2.1	2.0	2.2	2.1
4 Outcome and impact assessment	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.1
5 Meeting formal criteria from the Guide for Misereor partner organisations on commissioning external evaluations locally	3.4	3.5	4.0	3.6
6 Meeting the DAC criteria	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.9
7 Usefulness of the evaluation	1.9	1.8	2.7	2.1
8 Ownership	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Total	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.6.

The criterion “Meeting the DAC criteria” received the best rating, the average ratings of the criteria “Ownership”, “Usefulness of the evaluation” and “Accuracy and credibility” was “good” and the criterion “Meeting formal criteria from the Guide for Misereor partner organisations on commissioning external evaluations locally” received the most critical rating. This leads to the conclusion that the evaluations commissioned by the partner organisations meet the quality requirements necessary for accountability to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). At the same time, the evaluations offer partner organisations the opportunity to learn and to self-reliantly improve their projects. In terms of overall results, the evaluations from Asia and Africa / Middle East received a slightly better rating than those from Latin America. A significant change in the quality of evaluations could not be perceived during the said period of time.

Relating to the criterion “Outcome and impact assessment”, fundamental methodological weaknesses were detected such as a missing or insufficiently outlined logic of effects or theory of change, lacking consideration for the contrafactual and an insufficient differentiation with regards to the effects on the target groups. The deficits in meeting the formal criteria show that these criteria are either not formulated clearly enough for expert consultants and partner organisations to understand or that they are hard to implement.

The criterion “Participation” only received an overall rating of 3.0. In practice, “participation of the target groups” is mostly limited to the passive role of source of information. This contradicts the requirement to involve the target groups as the protagonists of their own development in the entire evaluation process. Many of the partner organisations are willing to involve the target groups more actively in the evaluation process. However, they lack the knowledge how to do so in practice.

When partners commission the evaluations themselves, this allows for a large number of obligatory evaluations to be carried out while requiring only minimum action on the side of Misereor staff and providing important information for drawing up in-house submissions for grant approval and final reports.

The partner organisations' sole responsibility for the evaluations commissioned by them strengthens their ownership and self-reliance. In some cases, however, interventions by Misereor without express request from the partner organisations hindered this desired effect.

The majority of respondents found Misereor's guide for this kind of evaluations useful. However, some respondents said that it is too detailed and that the language used in the guide is too complicated. In many cases, partner organisations completely adopted the model structure for the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation (in the annex of the guide) or only modified it slightly. Only in a small number of cases, the quality of the evaluation reports was controlled according to the minimum standards defined in the guide.

Misereor played a significant role in selecting the expert consultants in some countries, while in others, the selection process was carried out self-reliantly by the partner organisations. At the same time, the respondents expressed the wish to receive assistance from Misereor.

Recommendations (according to priority)

(1) Evaluations commissioned by partner organisations as a tool for accountability and project planning: To Misereor and BMZ: This form of evaluation should be continued as an important element of accountability and project planning.

(2) Ownership of the partner organisations: To Misereor: Misereor staff should only provide support with regards to evaluations commissioned by partner organisations upon express request by the respective partner organisation. If there is no sufficient relationship of trust between Misereor and a partner organisation, the evaluation should not be commissioned by the partner organisation. Instead, Misereor (team "Evaluation and Consultancy") should commission a joint external evaluation.

To Misereor: Misereor should promote exchange of experiences between partner organisations commissioning evaluations and offer trainings on specific topics related to the evaluation process.

To partner organisations: When developing the ToR, partner organisations should first identify the evaluation questions relevant for them and then use elements from the guide's model structure in a second step. If partner organisations need assistance to budget and plan evaluations or to develop ToR, they should specifically request this from Misereor.

(3) Selection of suitable expert consultants: To Misereor: Partner organisations should be encouraged to define their own criteria for selecting expert consultants. Misereor should keep lists of expert consultants that also include their field of expertise and their knowledge of local languages and contexts, and make these lists available to partner organisations as a form of general assistance. However, the partner organisations' choice should not be limited to these lists.

(4) Usefulness of the guide: To Misereor: The guide should be rewritten in simple (accessible) language. Elements mandatory for Misereor should be marked as such and additional elements should also be easily identifiable. Partner organisations should be encouraged to focus on their own evaluation questions and to select carefully which parts of the guide they use.

(5) Dealing with the evaluation recommendations: To Misereor: Misereor should stress the use and usefulness of the "Grid for monitoring the implementation of evaluation recommendations" in the guide more and also recommend it as a basis for discussions in partner dialogue.

To partner organisations: Partner organisations should use the "Grid for monitoring the implementation of evaluation recommendations" as a basis for discussions within their

organisations and with Misereor as well as for the preparation of discussions with the target groups.

(6) Improvement of the outcome and impact assessment and of the fulfilment of formal criteria in reporting: To Misereor: Misereor should put special emphasis on training expert consultants and partner organisations in the field of outcome and impact assessments. In addition to the concept of logic of effects and gender aspects, such trainings should also cover participatory evaluation approaches for outcome and impact assessment.

To Misereor: The formal criteria for evaluations commissioned by partner organisations should be reviewed with regards to their practicability and explained in more detail where necessary. The guide should be revised so as to include instructions on quality assurance that can also be used for partner dialogue.

(7) Participation of the target groups in the evaluation process: To Misereor: In the guide, Misereor should devote more attention to the topic of the target groups' participation in the evaluation process. Furthermore, partner organisations and local expert consultants should be made aware of and trained on "participatory evaluation".

To partner organisations: The target groups should be involved more strongly in the entire evaluation process. Among other things, this should be anchored in the ToR by requiring the expert consultants to develop a concept how to actively involve the target groups in the evaluation process.

Consultant team

Mr Erwin Geuder-Jilg

Dr Sabine Brüntrup-Seidemann