



ORIENTATION FRAMEWORK

Misereor –
Partnership with Asia and
Oceania

Aachen

July 2006

Orientation Framework:

Published by: Misereor, The German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development
Cooperation

Edited by: Department Asia & Oceania

Place of Publication: Aachen
July 2006

Since 1958 Misereor has been cooperating with partners in Asia and Oceania. Working in a spirit of partnership has been a guiding principle from the outset: our partners in Asia and Oceania are themselves best placed to analyse the specific challenges and then to plan and implement corresponding responses (development projects as well as efforts to influence the political framework conditions, and the necessary lobbying and advocacy work). We seek an open dialogue with our partners that permits criticism from both sides and the sharing of experience. In this, Misereor is guided by the Catholic Church's Preferential Option for the Poor and the principles of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that have always underpinned our work.

Misereor is the specialised agency for overseas development cooperation of the Catholic Church in Germany. Misereor and the German Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid/Katholische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe (KZE), founded in 1962 as the agency for co-funding projects with the German Government, cooperate directly as two legal bodies under one organizational roof. Misereor seeks and maintains partnerships with development organisations that benefit the poor, the neglected and the marginalised, irrespective of their religious convictions. In accordance with its statutes, Misereor supports a broad spectrum of development measures, but no missionary work - a fact that requires particular emphasis in many countries in Asia.

Partnership as prime principle

The partnership principle guiding our work proceeds from a basic understanding that shared visions and goals are a precondition for working together in a spirit of partnership. This forms the basis for a 'natural' - but not exclusive - partnership with the development offices, orders and religious congregations of the Catholic Church. In our cooperation with partners in Asia and Oceania in recent decades, we have also learned to work together with members of other faiths in fulfilling our mandate, to respect their independence and their sensibilities. It has often been pointed out to us that our spirituality based on a Christian view of humanity also enhances our credibility and facilitates cooperation.

As a result of the partnership approach, Misereor does not implement its own projects. Neither do we look for partners to implement 'our' projects, for instance by engaging local organisations to carry out pre-planned

projects under contract. Nor is Misereor aiming to export off-the-shelf concepts for development projects to Asia. In line with its partnership-based approach, Misereor does not maintain project offices in partner countries, either. Making use of a wide range of advisory and dialogue instruments, which can also include liaison offices in selected countries, we seek to promote common understanding and mutual learning. Misereor does not see itself as a donor agency in the traditional sense, whose main aim is limited to transfer money to Asia. We too (like our local partners) are of course dependent on financial support (donations and public-sector funding) in order to be able to promote development measures. We see ourselves as a partner organisation that also offers and promotes advisory and networking services to partners, and which undertakes lobby and advocacy work in Germany and Europe to support the cause and concerns of the poor (for example in the field of the improvement of labour conditions of women workers in the toy production in Asia). To be a partner in common development efforts means for us also that we are prepared to be criticized by our partners.

As a development organisation Misereor's main task is not in the field of emergency aid; nevertheless, we feel called upon to act in the face of natural disasters and serious political crisis situations. Experience gained in large-scale disasters that have occurred in recent years shows that a strict separation of emergency aid and longer-term measures is artificial. In many cases, our partner organisations themselves have also been affected by disasters and crisis situations. We focus on development-oriented emergency aid and longer-term reconstruction, especially as the basic principles underpinning these are the same as those applying to development work overall.

The poor as social actors

Many decades of cooperation with partners in Asia have enabled our partners and us to acquire a wealth of experience. The Asian continent and Oceania, with their cultural, economic, political, religious and historic heterogeneity, are marked by not just economic but also social dynamism that is co-driven by the poor, i.e. social realities are transformed by the poor themselves. Numerous development processes show that the poor too have skills and resources to break down social barriers, to secure basic needs self-reliantly, to influence decision-makers, monitor their actions, and reorganise societal processes. Increasingly, this is not just happening in

individual projects: development processes are becoming networked at regional and national level and also beyond national borders, as for example in the area of urban poverty. We have learned that being poor does not automatically translate into being helpless. We have also taken on board the fact that these successes cannot be achieved overnight, but are the result of long-term experience and persistent endeavour. Development takes time.

Observing how poor and disadvantaged population groups have succeeded in improving their material and socio-political situation, in standing up for their rights and even in influencing policy has helped us time and again to overcome setbacks. The contacts to people in partner countries, often going back many years, have also been a great source of strength.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Asia is increasingly in the spotlight, in particular on the economic front, and countries such as China and India are regarded as engines of the global economic upswing. But by training our eyes on Asia as an economic force, we can easily overlook increasing income disparities, the possibility of growing social tension, and the fact that more and more people are being pushed towards the margins. Through our development cooperation activities with partners in Asia and Oceania and in our educational, lobbying and public-relations work in Germany, we are attempting to counter this and to raise awareness of the social issues. Asia stands for more than economic growth under the banner of globalisation. Asia is a continent whose people have a rich cultural, social and spiritual heritage and future. It is our task to promote this view of Asia in our own country and to inform and educate our audiences accordingly.

General guidelines of Misereor's commitment

Misereor works with partners in almost all countries in Asia and some in Oceania (see annex: Fact Sheet). By analysing the most pressing challenges and through dialogue with partners, we have worked out general guidelines for our activities. The work of Misereor and its partners is intended to help

- gradually achieve more just living conditions, above all for the poor and disadvantaged. This includes working for civil and political human rights, and to establish economic, social and cultural human rights (for example the right to decent housing, adequate health care and access to education);

- reduce the potential for (violent) conflict and create the conditions for peaceful coexistence irrespective of people's religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. This also includes promoting interfaith understanding and dialogue, which is especially important in the Asian context;
- promote basic values relating to a Christian view of humanity (values also shared by other religions). Above all, this includes changing attitudes towards the disabled, the sick, the elderly and the poorest of the poor, as well as promoting values such as tolerance, peaceful (democratic) decision-making in society, and the scaling back of dominant power relations etc;
- strengthen civil-society organisations, including Church partners, with the expressed aim of enhancing their performance capability in many countries;
- ensure the sustainability and viability of our natural environment. This especially concerns efforts to protect genetic resources (biodiversity), land-use systems that help secure a life of dignity for coming generations, and the conservation of essential natural resources such as (drinking) water, air and soil;
- ensure livelihood for and strengthen the capacity of the poor to cope with problems of day-to-day survival.

Approaches of our commitment

In order to set a course for our work in individual countries and regions, it is necessary to evaluate results and experience on a regular basis and to analyse the (changing) country and region-specific challenges in a dialogue with our partners. The methodological challenge lies in developing further the link between thematic and country-specific priority areas, which will ultimately feed into the development of the individual country orientation frameworks. The two-pronged methodological approach outlined here, encompassing both (sectoral) themes and regional priority areas, is reflected in the structural organisation of Misereor's work, namely in the form of thematic groups functioning parallel to regional work groups. We currently operate the following thematic groups: Food Security, Land Use

and Environment; Impact and Quality; Urban Poverty and Urban Development; Human Rights; Health; Peace and Civil Conflict Management; Gender; Participation. A special group is looking into the challenge presented by HIV/AIDS. In addition to these thematic groups specialists are working on topics like vocational training, microfinance and business development for the poor.

Impact as basic orientation

The approach outlined for drawing up country orientation frameworks consciously implies a lack of standard (i.e. exclusive) answers to the question about which projects are to be promoted in Asia/Oceania or in individual countries. This is also due to the impact orientation of our own work and that of our partners – a topic accorded increasing attention. At the forefront are efforts to bring about real social changes that benefit the poor and disadvantaged in society rather than centring on the evaluation of the achievement of objectives by individual projects in terms of targets or purely quantitative indicators (such as the number of projects, number of beneficiaries etc.).

When setting the priority areas necessary for our work, it is always important to take into consideration our impact potentials and also those of our current or future regional partners. The “impact potentials” concept includes an assessment of available competencies of our own staff, as well as those of the partner. The priority areas thus derived are necessarily subjective, as we assume that we and our partners are particularly effective in those areas where we also have special competencies, know-how and scope for action. In other words: we concentrate our interventions especially in those areas where we and our potential partners are particularly effective. On the other hand, this focus on impact implies a conscious and thorough analysis and discussion of the effectiveness of our work and that of our partners.

In the definition of regional and sectoral priority areas, it is also important to assess the complementarity of other actors (e.g. other Church-based development agencies and NGOs), of networks, and of governmental or multilateral organisations. There is still much to be done in the area of complementary action, with the goal of raising the effectiveness of interventions.

Misereor as a 'learning organisation'

Misereor is consciously aiming to develop as a 'learning organisation'. In addition to more systematic learning from evaluations and consultancy assignments, this also involves learning from projects and programmes that operate in the thematic priority areas of our work. We are seeking to make this learning process a joint process that involves partners, networks and other development cooperation institutions and agencies, for example within the framework of the alliance of (15) Catholic development organisations from Europe and North America, CIDSE (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité).