

Strategy paper on water resources management, water supply, sanitation and hygiene

How MISEREOR's involvement in the water sector fits into the current action framework

Water is traditionally one of the priority areas of MISEREOR's support. Early on, technical realisation of projects was already supported by accompanying social measures. On the heels of the initial technical support came the idea of "helping people to help themselves". Building on this, and on the basis of MISEREOR's project experience, an understanding of support evolved that goes beyond the pure provision of water infrastructure and pursues socially relevant objectives.

As the development agency of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference committed to eradicating poverty in the world and speaking to the conscience of the powerful, MISEREOR's activity in the water sector is based on the principles of Christian social teaching: human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, community and the common good, justice, sustainability and options for the poor. People, their development opportunities, their options for social participation, the protection of their livelihoods and their dignity are at the heart of our interest in the water sector.

It is against this backdrop that MISEREOR takes its place in the ranks of international development cooperation and positions itself and its objectives within the major frameworks such as the human right to water and sanitation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time, in connection with the question of how these objectives are to be achieved there arise core issues on which our stance does not always agree with that of other actors. For example, on the basis of the principle of the common good, MISEREOR rules out any trading in water as a commodity or the privatisation of the water supply system as a legitimate means of achieving the SDGs.

Links to the human right to water and sanitation

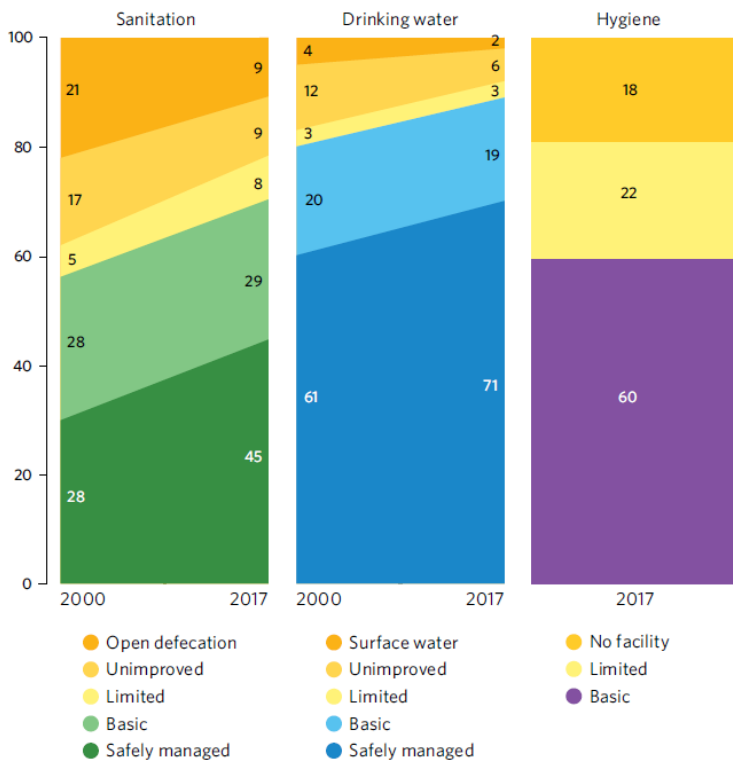
In July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly declared the right to water to be a human right by adapting General Comment No. 15 on economic, social and cultural human rights (ESC rights). This means that the legal right to water is recognised internationally, although the right is only enforceable if transposed into national law. The human right to water sets out standards that provide guidance on how this right is to be realised and what form access to water should take:



Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6) calls for international action on water and sanitation. The aim of SDG 6 is to ensure the availability of water and the sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. SDG monitoring indicates that on a global scale the goal has largely been achieved. However, other sources reveal that there is still a huge disparity between the goal and the reality.

Global coverage of sanitation, drinking water and hygiene services, 2000 and 2017 (percentage)



[Source: UN: “Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019”; New York 2019]

According to this diagram, just 11% of the world population lack basic access to drinking water. This contradicts other sources from the same period, which state that:

- 2.1 billion people lack access to safe and consistently available water (UNESCO World Water Development Report 2019)
- 1.8 billion people use drinking water that is bacterially contaminated (source: German Sustainability Strategy 2016, German government draft, May 2016).

In connection with hygiene and sanitation it is likewise clear that achievement of the goal is not yet within reach.

Current challenges in the water sector

Entrenched social inequality, political and economic interests, the advance of climate change and frequently, too, the interests of individuals all have a direct influence on the availability of water, especially for the poor. These factors thus influence MISEREOR’s involvement in project work and political work and are therefore relevant to the strategic orientation of its activities.

- **Water scarcity:** In many parts of the world, some sections of the population have insufficient water available to meet their needs. According to the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), some four billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least part of the year (WWAP 2019¹; BMZ 2017²). This raises the crucial question of who has access to the scarce resources or who is able to obtain access if there is insufficient water for all.

¹ Source: Weltrisikobericht 2019

² Source: Weltrisikobericht 2019

- **Access to water for poor sections of the population:** Poor or marginalised and vulnerable population groups are more likely than others to have difficulty accessing safe water supplies. They often lack even a basic water supply and are forced to use expensive or extremely unsafe sources. All too frequently they actually pay more for their water than more affluent groups with better access to water supplies (WWAP 2019).
- **Lack of safe infrastructure and safe facility management:** Water infrastructure remains extremely sparse in rural areas, so that millions of women, men and children are not covered by water and sanitation services. Moreover, the institutional capacity, including domestic resource mobilisation and budget allocations – at both national and subnational levels – is insufficient to cater for the maintenance needs of the installed water infrastructure (UN WWR 2019).
- **Hygiene and mortality:** The World Water Development Report (WWAP 2019) of the United Nations concludes that annual deaths as a result of inadequate water and sanitation (780,000) are ten times the number of deaths attributable to conflict and war (75,000). Globally, the number of people affected by flooding (106 million) and drought (55 million) is two and a half times the number affected by conflict (65 million) (WWAP 2019).
- The water sector attracts the interest of private investors and companies on account of its **economic potential**. The private sector also acquires power over water resources and access to them under the guise of protecting the environment or contributing to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Companies and banks advance land take, the privatisation of water infrastructure and the trade in bottled water or in water on the stock exchange. For example, when countries are offered international loans, this may be linked to conditions that require them to open up their water market. Water is a resource that investors and entrepreneurs regard as a tradable commodity that should be subject to the market. The logic of the market dictates that water becomes more expensive when it is scarce. Ultimately this makes it more difficult for poor population groups with little financial potential to access water at times when it is scarce – a situation that is clearly incompatible with MISEREOR’s view of water as a human right and a natural resource.

The objectives of MISEREOR’s activities in the field of water resources management, water supply, sanitation and hygiene

As a contribution to successful implementation of the SDGs and achievement of the human right to water and sanitation for all, MISEREOR pursues the following objectives, which go beyond the pure provision of water in that they are intended to focus on the people, improve their development options and safeguard their livelihoods and the vital resources that they need to survive.

Without prioritisation, the objectives are:

- to provide sufficient and safe drinking water as part of the basis of life
- to improve the health situation via drinking water and hygiene measures
- to safeguard the food situation through irrigation
- to boost household incomes via water as a means of production
- to improve the security situation and promote peace
- to improve access to education
- to improve gender equality
- to use water resources to establish an energy supply
- to conserve resources in order to maintain the basis of people’s livelihoods
- to strengthen democratic structures and democratic awareness.

This wide range of objectives demonstrates that the water sector has impacts far beyond SDG 6 and that it interfaces with other development objectives (SDG 1 – steps to end poverty; SDG 2 – food security; SDG 3 – health; SDG 4 – education; SDG 5 – gender equality; SDG 7 – sustainable and modern energy; SDG 13 – action to combat climate change). Over and above SDG 6, the water sector is thus an important element in achieving these other goals.

These goals should be viewed in tandem with the principles of Christian social teaching listed above. In our project work these principles underlie all our action at the level of both objectives and implementation. They have the following consequences:

Human dignity and a focus on the common good: People are at the heart of our project work. Their wellbeing is the focus of MISEREOR's activities. The outcomes for people are the benchmark of all activities and they should take ownership of all measures. In the interest of the individual and the social structures in which he or she lives, his or her development takes precedence over the interests of private businesses. This idea finds expression at project level: for example, in connection with access rights to water it emphasises the development of the common good and means that the supply of water to settlements and villages must be ensured before private agricultural businesses can take the water they require. As another example, any Watershed must first serve the people living in the catchment area.

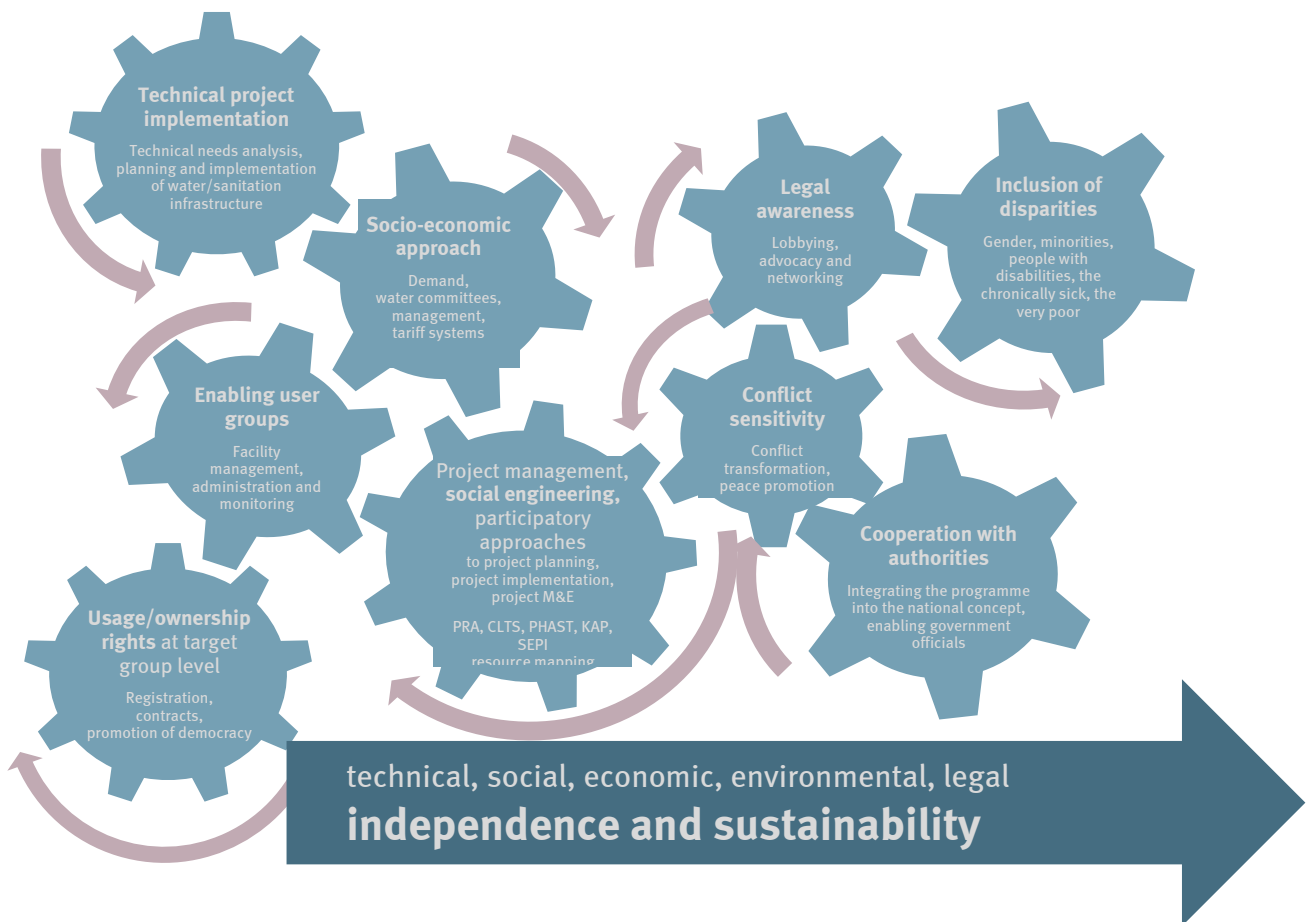
Solidarity and options for the poor: All projects are designed in such a way that it is mainly vulnerable and dependent households who are integrated and supported and whose potential for development is enhanced by the project. All population groups and social classes should be involved in decision-making processes. At the same time, our approach in the field of water supply also involves getting more affluent households to contribute more in order to support weaker families. Key instruments of project work are therefore the provision of personal contributions by everyone involved and the establishment of tariff systems that are adapted to the poverty situation of households.

Subsidiarity: The participation of affected people in everything from project planning to management and operation of water supply infrastructure is one of the concepts that underlie our project work. As part of project activities, user groups are trained so that they are able to manage their facilities themselves – technically, economically and for the common good. As legally recognised recipients, users and managers of the facility, groups should enter into contracts with the responsible authorities and manage the tariff systems autonomously and transparently with accountability to the users. MISEREOR refuses to force the facilities to be managed by private businesses and with no right of co-determination, as happens in the course of privatisation. If as a result of external influences (inflation, natural disaster, etc.) the user group is unable to perform this self-management task by itself, the user group should be integrated into a higher-level civil society structure and be able to delegate its task where necessary.

Justice: Via the concept of participation by all population groups, recognition of the user groups by the authorities, the assumption of responsibility by the relevant authorities and the projects' focus on environmental and social sustainability, the projects promote social and legal justice in an equalising way.

Methods of pursuing our objectives in MISEREOR's project activities and political advocacy

This multi-axis concept gives rise to a complex system of approaches and methods that project partners should enshrine and observe in their project work in order to ensure sustainability at target level:



The interplay of these approaches is crucial to successful implementation of the projects that MISEREOR supports. At the same time, the technical concept must be adapted to the challenges and the life context. The technical planning must ensure that technical specifications do not risk compromising sustainability. This means that the user groups must – in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity – take decisions about the facility themselves and manage it in their interest. Technical implementation must therefore match the capacities of the population.

In its project work MISEREOR basically funds all infrastructure measures that local people themselves want, that can be operated and managed in their interest, that are relevant in terms of improving the user groups' situation and that are likely to represent an efficient use of funds. These include:

- raising groundwater levels
- extracting groundwater
- tapping springs
- capturing surface water
- retaining rainwater
- resource conservation
- water resources management and development of catchment areas
- water treatment
- treatment and use of wastewater / sewage

Political demands

Directed at the relevant government, the EU and the UN:

- introduction of an international “court” or a similar body via which legal claims in relation to various global challenges can be brought:
 - implementation of the human right to water enforceable if signatory states do not comply with it;
 - unsustainable use of water resources – private overuse of scarce resources;
 - adherence to the “polluter pays” principle – those who pollute and overuse should be held responsible;
 - domestic user interests such as drinking water and water for domestic purposes before private-sector use (industry, plantations, etc.)
 - the common good before the interests of entrepreneurs!
 - international recognition of water as a common good and not as a tradable commodity.
- Strengthen users in self-administration and inform them of their rights (NGOs), call for the principle of subsidiarity (lobbying work); improve skills!
- Protect the country’s own water resources, strict adherence to water regulations.
- Persuade the community of states not to link loans and international agreements to privatisation of the water market or privatisation of the right to use water resources.
- State development cooperation must not aim to bring about the privatisation of resources and the water supply system with tax revenue and national private-sector participation.

Directed at the EU:

- EU directive to halt privatisation of the water supply system.

Directed at the UN:

- Strengthen transboundary water resources management (use of resources, tracking adherence to the “polluter pays” principle at country level).

Directed at business and research:

- Development and marketing of adapted and affordable technologies and water analyses (giving priority to user interests over business profits) // fluoride, arsenic
- Stop the sale of water in single-use plastic containers.

Annex to the document:

Promotion Guidelines for Water Programmes and Projects in Africa