

Misean Cara Learning Brief 2020/03

# Investing in Organisational Capacity Development

Learning from an impact assessment of Misean Cara members in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia.



**misean cara**  
Mission Support from Ireland

## 1. Introduction

In 2019, Misean Cara commissioned an impact assessment of members' investment in capacity development and organisational systems strengthening. The evaluation, involving five Misean Cara members in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia, was undertaken by Nicole Moran Associates during May to November 2019. Findings from project visits were reinforced by an online survey involving a further 34 Misean Cara members and staff, and focus group sessions in Rome and Ireland.

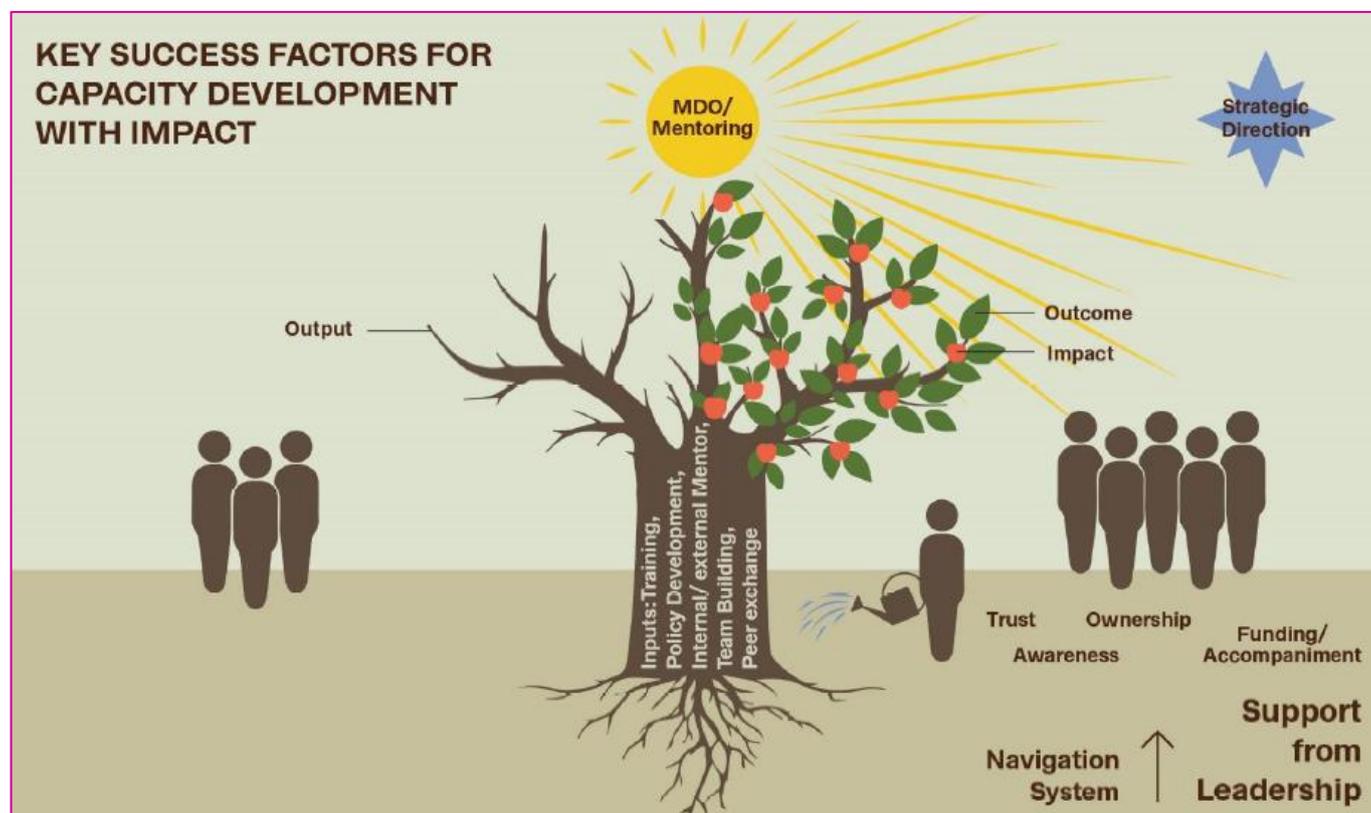
This Learning Brief is based on the Thematic Learning Report of this evaluation, highlighting common trends and key learnings from the evaluation process. The following sections focus on:

- External and internal drivers of change;
- Support from leadership;
- Mentorship as a catalyst for change;
- How developing capacity improves results; and
- Other learning from the evaluation.

## 2. Drivers of Change

The evaluation highlighted the important role of external drivers motivating members to undertake new development processes. These included: more demanding donor requirements,<sup>1</sup> evaluation findings and audit reports. Failure to respond to these drivers can have negative consequences for a project, including loss of funding, which is an incentive to advance discussion within congregations to initiate change.

However, internal factors are also important. Members noted that, with declining vocations in many countries and active members ageing, there was a need to look into evolution planning, and to involve suitably-qualified team members who can deliver project objectives into the future. There is also the need to prepare projects or institutions for sustainability, either by handing them over to others, or ensuring financial self-sufficiency. Internal evaluations or reviews have shown that, in order to increase resources or to ensure best results with decreasing resources, the quality of project designs and proposals needs to be improved. Finally, it was noted that many missionaries who originally trained as teachers, doctors, or nurses have not been trained for the role of professional development workers, which they now must take on.



<sup>1</sup> New donor requirements included more technical and detailed proposal forms, and increased reporting requirements to comply with funders' accountability and transparency needs.

### 3. Support from Leadership

Throughout the evaluation, Misean Cara's members confirmed that capacity development processes move faster when they can count on support from leadership. Missionaries with strong support from their leadership tend to develop strong local missions, raise more funds and implement efficient, effective projects.

Leadership has to be well-informed and can benefit greatly from training on topics such as governance of development projects, so they can take appropriate decisions and assign the right people to each role. As the leadership within congregations tends to change every 4-6 years, (and in some missionary projects every 2-3 years), it is important to set up structures so that the capacity development/organisational strengthening process continues without disruption.

Members' learning on how leadership support can be encouraged included:

- **Involving leadership in an active role:** For this it is important to share with the leadership what isn't working, as otherwise they are unable to provide support. For example, the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph (FMSJ) Development Officer informs the regional leadership on a regular basis about developments and challenges in the projects. As a result, the regional leadership understands project contexts and challenges, which helps them take better decisions and play an active role in supporting the projects.
- **Developing leadership capacity by ensuring their participation in training:** In providing training on current issues for leadership, it is helpful to engage an expert who can present strong evidence, citing references and examples, thus demonstrating the urgency around an issue and reminding leaders of their responsibility. For example, the Inter-Congregational Child Safeguarding Group in Kenya invited an expert on canon law who introduced documents from the Vatican demonstrating the need to take an active role on child safeguarding.
- **Using the right language to motivate leadership to feel a sense of ownership in the process:** For some, a word like 'results' is motivating; for others it could be 'values'. For example, the Presentation Sisters have used the Charity Governance Code as a basis for developing good practices. However, they have adjusted some of the formal language so that the message is aligned to their own context and the Sisters feel this connection.

### The Presentation Sisters' Capacity Development Journey

A Resources and Development workshop in 2014 with representatives from all units of the congregation was the starting point of the capacity development journey and a way of **sensitising and building awareness** across all Presentation Sisters' units on the importance of working according to good practices in management and governance.

As an outcome of the International Resources and Development Workshop, a **Resources and Development Team** was set up by the Central Leadership Team in 2016 to draw together those working in the fields of finance, mission support, development, and governance.

The work of the Resources and Development Team is guided by a **Strategic Plan** which, as one of the team members pointed out, *"Enables the work to be thought out, as against piecemeal, and delivered to a schedule and timeframe"*.

In the same year, a **Governance Development Coordinator** was appointed, whose role is to "co-ordinate, assess and monitor the development of good practice across the congregation." This position is the driver of the whole process, working closely with the Central Leadership Team and the Resources and Development Team.

By implementing a Resources and Development Team and the Governance Development Coordinator, the Presentation Sisters have ensured that capacity development/organisational strengthening is happening in a systemic way instead of introducing disconnected and unsustainable threads.



Teachers at the Kaoma Presentation School, Zambia

## 4. Mentorship, a catalyst for change

The evaluation highlighted that participation in training alone does not ensure that theory is translated into practice. Guidance and support are required to reinforce new learning, to apply it and integrate it into daily practice. Mentoring is very important at this stage, and can be provided in different ways. Providing roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, different approaches in combination can be effective:

- Often the MDO<sup>2</sup> will take a lead role in developing the capacity of project teams, serving as mentor to colleagues during each step of the project cycle, from proposal development and implementation to monitoring and reporting, as well as related topics.
- In other cases, members have a local Development Office that is closer to the projects and well-placed to mentor them in all phases of the project cycle.
- Members also frequently mentioned Misean Cara's regional Development Mentors, who provide valuable mentorship support in response to members' needs and requests.
- In some projects, an experienced staff member with relevant skills and knowledge will assume the role of mentor, for example after a colleague returns from training or a new policy is introduced.
- In other cases, an external mentor is engaged. For example, the La Salle School in Karemno, Kenya, hired a mentor for teachers, students and parents with the aim of improving educational outcomes.
- A different approach is that of Viatores Christi, where Volunteer Development Workers (VDWs) mentor local teams. For example, a VDW in Kenya acted as Development Officer, while supporting a local FMSJ team member preparing to take over this role. Other VDWs have guided local teams through a needs assessment exercise, setting up a monitoring system, and the introduction of a computerised patient information system.

Mentoring can thus strengthen project planning, implementation and reporting skills in project leaders and staff, which in turn tends to increase the rate of successful grant applications. A mentor will be effective as a catalyst for change if they have a strong professional background and relevant people skills, such as intercultural sensitivity, gender awareness, empathy, and the ability to listen, motivate, and build trust.

## The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary's Development Office

The MSHR Development Coordinator/ MDO, a Chartered Accountant with an MA in Development Studies, is an active mentor for the project teams, guiding them in proposal and report writing, implementation, fundraising, continuously building the capacities of the teams, visiting them frequently to monitor the work as well as to provide mentoring support. Additionally, she has **an Assistant**, also very experienced and trained in development (with a degree in accounting, currently working towards her MA in International Development, and having attended several trainings as the Development Coordinator). Both are based in the Development Office in Dublin, Ireland.

During annual monitoring visits to the different projects, the Development Officer will continue to monitor as well as support the teams in any of the challenges they face, especially in ensuring that **what was learned in trainings and what is written down in policies is put into practice**. The Development Office also has the oversight function and can assess how far the Sisters' capacities have improved, and what further training is required. The office is therefore **in a position to respond with refresher trainings or new training content**.

Missionary formation in MSHR is a combination of academic and religious formation. In Nigeria this now includes training in financial management, basics of results-focused planning and child protection (an initiative currently being extended to other countries). A special training package has been developed with the engagement of the Formators and Congregational Leadership to ensure that each novice and future Sister has a basic understanding of and is conscious of **accountability**.



Sister Chinyere Nwesu MSHR with Child Protection Policy at the Holy Rosary Vocational Institute Igbo, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> The Missionary Development Officer (MDO) is a key liaison and support person in Misean Cara member organisations.

## 5. How developing capacity improves results

Throughout the evaluation process, Misean Cara members and staff discussed the changes they observed as a result of capacity development, with most of the examples given corroborated by feedback from Misean Cara Staff and Mentors or other members. In this section, these improved results are considered at three levels:

- **Output Level:** New knowledge, new or revised policies or procedures.
- **Outcome Level:** Enhanced performance.
- **Impact Level:** Improved development indicators

### Output Level

#### **Introduction of strategies, procedures and policies:**

As part of the organisational strengthening process, new guiding documents and procedures were developed and introduced. For example, both CAPIO and FMSJ developed **strategic plans** which included capacity development as one of the objectives.

**New knowledge:** The development of policies led to members expanding their knowledge on the respective topics and becoming better-informed on procedures and regulations; for example, children's rights, safeguarding, and documentation (e.g. the importance of collecting and retaining receipts). In Zambia, Kenya and Nigeria, teachers met to share new knowledge from training received on pedagogy and how to interact with children.

#### **New structures to support capacity development and effectiveness of development projects:**

Two members had set up specific structures to support their capacity development journey:

- With the support of assigned Volunteer Development Workers from Viatores Christi, FMSJ set up a **Development Office** to support project teams in planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting their projects and also fundraising, with the Development Officer playing an important mentoring role.

*"The Development Office empowered all projects and it empowered me. With their guidance we move further"*

*FMSJ Sister*

- The Presentation Sisters set up a **Resource and Development Team**, which guides the congregation's organisational strengthening and capacity develop-

ment journey with a dedicated **budget** and **strategic plan** (see page 3).

### Outcome Level

**Stronger support from Leadership:** For some members, support from leadership has increased, and is now driving and strengthening the capacity development process. For example:

- The Presentation Sisters' highest level of authority made a commitment to six standards of governance which are now at the root of their capacity development process. This enhanced leadership support has been visible during project visits through the support and guidance given to the unit leadership teams on good practice in governance and monitoring the safeguarding policy.
- The steering committee of the Inter-Congregational Child Safeguarding Group in Kenya, led by the De La Salle Brothers, has secured support and buy-in from their leadership teams for work on safeguarding by providing concrete evidence of need.
- The FMSJ Development Office is a bridge between the projects and the regional leadership team. Through regular updates from the Development Officer, regional leadership has better understanding of the projects and the challenges they face, which has improved decision-making, and encouraged leadership to take a more active oversight role.
- There is a stronger working relationship between the Leadership and the regions and ministries in MSHR, which is seen to be the result of leadership support for organisational strengthening as well as improved dialogue between the levels.

#### **Successful fundraising and diversification of funding sources:**

Improved proposal-writing has increased the rate of funding approvals and enabled engagement with new donors. Members are also more aware of the wide range of potential donors and how to identify and approach them. The annual week-long workshop on *"Grant Writing and Fundraising for Missionary Projects"* organised by the Salvatorian Office For International Aid (SOFIA) in Rome was mentioned by both staff and members as an enabling factor. Other important factors were support from a skilled MDO and mentoring through the Development Office.

#### **Improving financial management for accountability and transparency:**

Member projects who received training and follow-up mentoring in the area of financial management shared their experience of how this led to the introduction, or updating, of financial management guidelines, which in turn contributed to strengthening accountability and transparency. In two congregations,

new accounting software was introduced, which improved reconciliation, budget control and reporting. In addition, better understanding of the links between log-frame, budget, accounts and reporting has led to more efficient and effective project implementation.

### Impact Level

Though there are many factors that influence the development of projects (for example the political environment, changing donor agendas, high turnover among teachers), evidence from this evaluation clearly shows how capacity development and organisational strengthening have contributed to improved development indicators.

**Wider geographical reach and increase in number of project participants/ beneficiaries:** Increased capacity to develop successful proposals has led to greater funding security, continuity of project activities and opportunities to increase the scope and reach of certain projects. In addition, informed discussions around value for money, efficiency and effectiveness have contributed to improved decision-making; for example, proposing a new service-delivery model that reaches three times as many patients with no increase in budget.

**Influencing policy change through advocacy:** Training on advocacy and enhanced technical capacity, together with increasing a project's visibility and credibility over time, can lead to successful policy advocacy at different levels, which in turn can bring significant benefit to large populations.

**Increasing school attendance, improved educational outcomes and fewer behaviour issues:** Building the capacity of teachers, for example on teaching methods, classroom management without violence, and child safeguarding, helps teachers mature in their profession and, combined with mentoring for teachers, students and parents, improves relationships between teachers and students. Students have more trust in, and respect for, their teachers, and feel safe to speak up and raise issues, knowing that teachers will listen. This improves the overall quality of children's school experience, which in turn contributes to measurable improvements in key education indicators.

*"In a classroom, you allow students to share their ideas, you discuss them and correct them where necessary. In the past the teacher had the final instructions and the final answers. It is now more interactive teaching. This has improved student performance – it is*

*clearly visible in the results of the student records."*

*Teachers at La Salle School*

**Ownership of the project by the community:** Understanding different approaches to problem identification, such as problem analysis or needs assessment, leads to enhanced consultation with communities in defining problems, and strengthens their participation in finding solutions.



*La Salle School, Karamenu, Kenya*

## 6. Further Learnings

A number of other important learnings were captured across the project site visits, key informant interviews and survey responses, as described here:

**Capacity development requires commitment to learning and personal development at all levels.**

Although support from leadership and a mentor are important, a further critical factor is individual openness to growth and personal development, and commitment to learning by all those involved in the capacity development process. Making everybody aware of the need to proactively embrace change will strengthen this commitment. Regular meetings, inputs by external experts, and sharing with other congregations will all help to build this awareness and reduce the fear of change.

**Capacity development and organisational strengthening are continuous processes that take time**

Capacity development has to be a continuous process which needs planned time and energy allocated to it if it is to lead to change. Participation in a training event may increase the knowledge of the person attending, but this individual learning has to be reinforced by other measures if it is to generate a lasting shift in organisational practices and systems. A combination of external and internal training together with mentoring support was seen as most beneficial by those projects visited.

As mentioned above, support from leadership is essential to ensure that this is a continuous process, properly resourced with funding and time.

### Capacity development is about learning and un-learning

There is no quick fix to make projects more effective and no fast track to increase capacity. Capacity development is about learning and change: learning new knowledge, and developing new procedures, then applying the knowledge, and implementing the procedures. This often involves the letting go of "old" ways; in other words, it may be necessary to "unlearn" some things so that change can happen. A sound understanding of learning theories and theories of change can be valuable in initiating and sustaining these changes, for example:

- Develop a **learning culture** within your organisation; in other words, help your project, team or organisation evolve into a **learning organisation**<sup>3</sup> where individual learning inspires organisational learning, and organisational learning drives development.
- After training, draw up an **Action Plan** and support the application of learning by asking:
  1. What have we learned?
  2. What are our first steps as we apply this new learning?
  3. What will support or block our learning being applied successfully?
  4. How can we break through these blocks?

Take note of the answers to emerge from this reflection and make them part of your action plan.

- Integrate the **Action Learning Cycle**<sup>4</sup> in every capacity development process, and reinforce this approach through regular meetings. Ensure that reflection takes place alongside practice, and opportunities for change are recognised.
- After training, ensure that **knowledge is shared** with other project staff, and explore how new learning can be applied within the organisation.

### The value of Critical Reflective Practice<sup>5</sup>

It was noted that, where new policies or procedures have been introduced, there is seldom sufficient time and space allocated for critical reflection around the experience of implementation.

The same occurs after training events, where no time is set aside to reflect on what has been learnt.

Practice, followed by critical reflection on that practice, is key to ensuring that learning is internalised and sustained. This also requires openness and trust to share experiences, both positive and negative. Such critical reflection leads to deeper understanding of processes, which in turn leads to innovation and improved practice.

### Learning from and with others and sharing experiences is supportive

#### "Learn-and-Share" at CAPIO

Every Friday, for two hours, a **learn-and-share** session takes place in the office of CAPIO. Each week, one team member facilitates the session. Staff share learnings from their work areas; for example, accounting, communication, relaxation therapy, or health. One staff member is responsible for organising this, to ensure that each week there is a volunteer to facilitate the session, so that it happens regularly on a weekly basis.

Additionally, after a project team member has attended an external training of relevance to the learning of the organisation, space is made for the person to **share their learning by doing a short version of the training they had attended for their project team**.

The project head ensures that this is done within three months of the staff member attending the external training. This mechanism not only **reinforces the training lessons** for the person who participated, but also adds to **institutional knowledge when it is shared with the other team members**.



CAPIO team "Share and Learn" Session, Nigeria

Dialogue with colleagues from other congregations sharing similar experiences at joint workshops, training

<sup>3</sup> Zeeman, A. (2017). Senge's Five Disciplines of Learning Organizations.

<https://www.toolshero.com/management/five-disciplines-learning-organizations/>

<sup>4</sup> Kemp, E. (2019): The Action Learning Cycle: How to learn consciously by taking action.

<https://blog.mo-benzi.com/2019/07/18/the-action-learning-cycle-how-to-learn-consciously-by-taking-action/>

<sup>5</sup> Smith, M (1999). Reflection, learning and education. <https://infed.org/mobi/reflection-learning-and-education/>

events or networking meetings can be a powerful source of shared learning. Many members said they found it enriching and supportive to take part in workshops with other congregations and share experiences as well as resources. These “share-and-learn” activities are perceived as more effective than traditional lecture-based training. Such peer-to-peer learning is seen as particularly effective because participants understand each other’s realities and communicate in familiar language.

## 7. Conclusion

Key learnings and common identified success factors for capacity development were identified as being support from leadership, and the awareness and ownership of the learning journey by those participating. A strategic plan to guide the process as well as allocated resources such as sufficient personnel, and dedicated time to

implement and apply the learning. The inclusion of mentorship to reinforce learning from trainings was also seen to be very valuable throughout the process.

Good practice examples identified in the capacity development journey were: A strategic approach and plan, and setting up structures such as a Development Office; mentoring and accompaniment to the project leaders and staff; an inclusive approach i.e. involving all by integrating key trainings into novitiate programmes and including standard trainings for all members and staff of the congregation; internal share and learn sessions; step down training and teambuilding activities.

This learning brief has captured the key findings of this evaluation process and highlighted the capacity development investment and approaches used by some Misean Cara members. It is hoped that these learnings can be applied to other organisations both in the international development and wider sectors.

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## About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development movement made up of 88 member organisations working in over 50 countries. We work with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in developing countries. Adopting a human rights focus, we support communities addressing basic needs in the areas of education, health, and livelihoods, as well as advocating for economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. At times of humanitarian crisis, the trusted and long-term presence of missionaries in affected communities also allows for rapid, efficient and targeted responses.

Misean Cara and our members work collectively and individually through the missionary approach to development. This framework is based on five values: respect, justice, commitment, compassion and integrity. Together, these establish the basis for the approach of missionaries to good development practice.

Our Strategy 2017-2021 identifies five goals:

- Uphold the right to quality education
- Uphold the right to better health, clean water and sanitation
- Uphold the right to sustainable livelihoods
- Uphold and advocate for human rights
- Enhance and promote the missionary approach to development.

Further expressing our desire to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised, the Strategy sees Misean Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on targeting five groups: women, children, refugees, displaced people and people with disabilities.

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