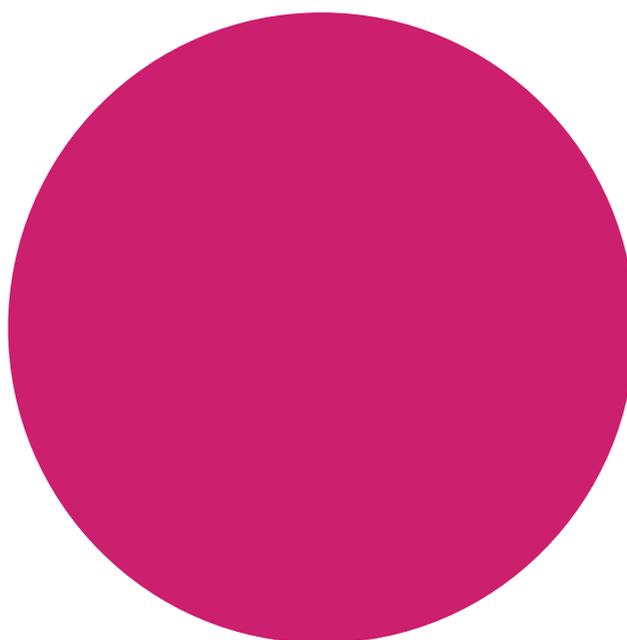


Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2021/01

Reaching those furthest behind

Research findings on the unique way of missionaries to engage with the most marginalised people



misean cara
Mission Support from Ireland

1. Introduction

Misean Cara is an Irish and international missionary member organisation supporting development, humanitarian and emergency projects in over 50 countries in the Global South. Misean Cara's members work with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities to realise their human rights through the delivery of basic services in education, health, livelihoods and income generation, as well as advocacy, networking and community mobilisation.

In 2017, Misean Cara commissioned research into the approaches to development projects adopted by its member organisations. This resulted in the formulation of a *Missionary Approach to Development (MADI)*.

Further information on the *Missionary Approach to Development Interventions (MADI)* can be found in the [Learning Brief 2018/02: Missionary Approach to Development Interventions](#).

For more information, please visit miseancara.ie

Further research conducted in 2020 was focussed on how this Missionary Approach enables reaching those furthest behind. The research was largely based on interviews with Misean Cara staff, representatives of different member organisations in Ireland and overseas, and external stakeholders, including Irish Aid.

This learning brief summarises the findings of this research on how the Missionary Approach to Development Interventions (MADI) enables missionaries to reach those furthest behind.

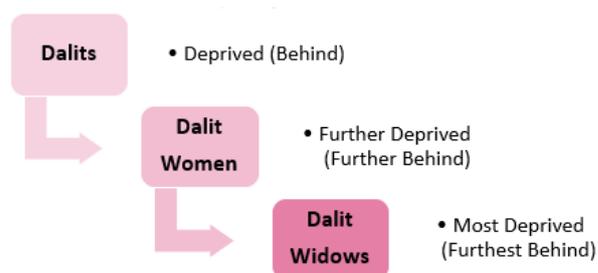
2. Examples from practice

Missionaries take their inspiration from the Gospels, and in particular from the manner in which Jesus always associated with and prioritised those who were on the margins of society and were often despised by those in leadership roles, or by the rest of society. References in St. Matthew's Gospel to the last, the least and the lost resonate closely with the commitments to 'leave no one behind' and 'reach the furthest behind first' that are at the core of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Exploring how missionaries use this understanding in practice, this research largely focussed on the work Misean Cara members are doing worldwide. The following paragraphs give a flavour of their work.

2.1 Dalit women in India

The Good Shepherd Sisters in India work towards the economic and social empowerment of Dalit and Tribal Women. When preparing their baseline study to understand who to work with, they used the layers of deprivation approach as outlined below. With their survey, they identified that members of the Dalit community were very vulnerable and marginalised. Within this group, the women were identified as being particularly marginalised (further behind), and finally, within this sub-group of women, widows were seen as the furthest behind group.



Missionaries often adopt a layered approach to identifying those who are furthest behind

The project team identified social and economic exclusion, gender inequality and illiteracy as some of the key layers of exclusion. They decided to tackle these challenges by educating participants on their basic human rights and financial literacy, as well as promoting social and economic inclusion through income generating co-operatives. Husbands and male extended family members of widows support women's economic activities through dedicated men groups set up by the project.

The project successfully reduced the level of domestic violence and discrimination against women, increased women's income through profitable economic activities, and increased their level of confidence and self-esteem. With better leadership skills, women can access Government support and financial institutions. The project team also advocates for women's rights and increased access to Government welfare measures.

2.2 Ava Guaraní children in Paraguay

In Paraguay, the indigenous Ava Guaraní are among the most marginalised people, whose rights are often violated, land ownership challenged, and culture and language disrespected.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit support indigenous communities in their efforts to preserve their language and culture, and protect their land, by advocating with the national government and working with local stakeholders.

After years of lobbying with the government as part of a wider network, a law for indigenous education was passed in 2007, allowing the Ava Guaraní to receive education in their own language. The project team now works with Ava Guaraní communities to design their own curriculum and didactic material, ensuring relevance to their culture.



Preparation of reading material for students

Teachers and community members, such as village eldest and religious leaders, work together to produce textbooks based on the ancestral wisdom of the communities. Students draw the images for the books, making them truly their own.



A textbook for second year Ava Guaraní students

This project not only allows Ava Guaraní children to access their fundamental right to education, but also strengthens their cultural and personal identity. As a result, children are more empowered to stand up for their rights and the rights of their communities, which lays the ground for sustainable change.

2.3 Challenging stigma in Zambia

Major factors in leaving people behind are stigma and discrimination. One group that is particularly vulnerable to stigma are ex-prisoners.

The Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa in Zambia have two projects working with these often-excluded people. In the Livingstone Correctional Facility, one project supports inmates in their rehabilitation and reintegration into their families and communities. The project offers training on non-violent communication and conflict management to build self-esteem, learn how to deal with anger, and move towards reconciliation. They also provide education programmes and technical courses, including in carpentry, plumbing, electrical, tailoring and design, general agriculture and basic computer skills. These technical skills help inmates after their release to find employment or be self-employed, and thus to provide for their family.



Technical training allowed Moses to open his own workshop

Moses studied metal fabrication, carpentry and joinery while serving a prison sentence. When he was released in 2017, his qualifications allowed him to open a business and provide for his wife and five children.

Today, he employs seven workers; four of them are former inmates whom Moses is helping to reintegrate into society.

3. Research findings

These examples demonstrate that faith-based missionary organisations have a deep understanding of those who are furthest behind in society, and of how to prioritise them in their project work. The MADI framework identifies five key values that underpin the work of missionaries: crossing boundaries, a long-term commitment, personal witness, a prophetic vision, and a holistic approach¹.

Through conducting interviews with project teams and leadership representatives of several of Misean Cara’s members, we found that each of these five key values can help us understand how missionaries prioritise the rights and needs of the most vulnerable people within their communities.

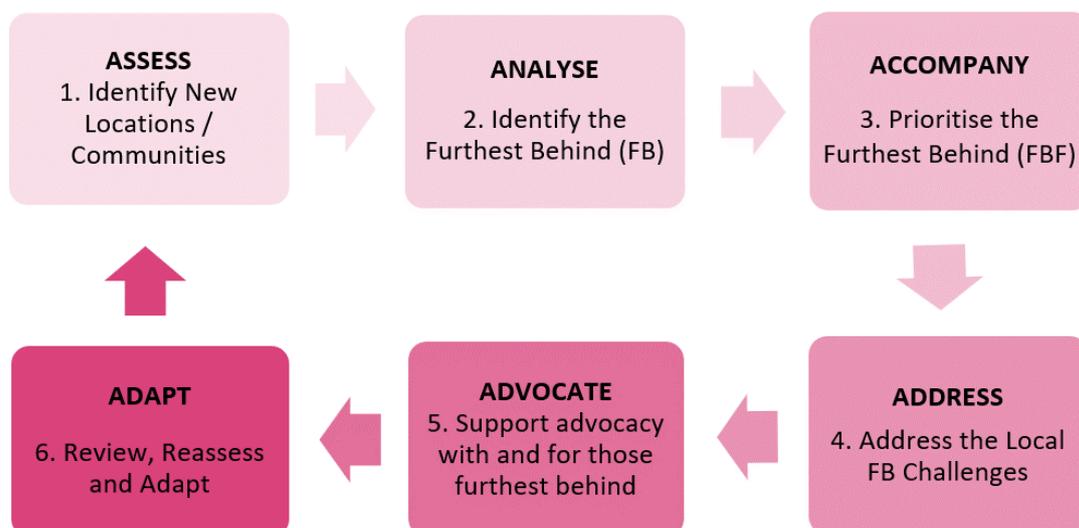
Based on these findings, the consultant for this research, Mike Williams, proposed a framework to summarise how missionaries seek to work with those furthest behind.

3.1 The 6-As Approach

1. **Assess:** When missionaries move to a new location, they identify communities based on external reports and initial assessments.
2. **Analyse:** They work with local communities to conduct participatory baseline surveys and

needs assessments, identifying those who are likely to be *further behind* (like women and girls), and *furthest behind* because of their specific circumstances (like girls with disabilities and female refugees). Missionaries adopt a layered approach to find those who are furthest behind in the community; and understand how and why these people are being marginalised.

3. **Accompany:** Missionaries support these groups to identify their priorities and assist them to change their situation. Sometimes, this means designing entire projects for those furthest behind. When it is not possible to prioritise this group, they should nevertheless be considered in project design.
4. **Address:** Working with those furthest behind often requires a different pace and scale due to their situation, being particularly sensitive to local cultural and social issues; and seeking creative solutions to overcome cultural barriers.
5. **Advocate:** Missionaries support those furthest behind to self-advocate and strengthen local systems. They also advocate at national or international levels to create lasting change.
6. **Adapt:** Missionaries recognise that the situation of people can change and adapt their projects to continuously understand and work with those furthest behind. They build resilience in the most vulnerable communities and respond to the needs of newly emerging *furthest behind* groups.



¹ Please refer to the [Learning Brief 2018/02: Missionary Approach to Development Interventions](#) for more details.

3.2 Using the Framework as an Analysis Tool

The 6-As approach can be used as a guide during the process of identifying and prioritising the needs and rights of those furthest behind. It can also be used as a monitoring or evaluation tool to check on whether existing projects have conducted a full and appropriate analysis in seeking to address the needs of those left furthest behind, and to improve that analysis where necessary.

	Actions
ASSESS	Use existing analyses and reports from Government or other development agencies to identify very vulnerable or marginalised communities within a country or district.
	Conduct an initial assessment of those furthest behind. You can use the UNDP 5-Point Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination: Are they marginalised because of their gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.? • Shocks and Fragility: How vulnerable are they to the effects of climate change, natural hazards, violence, conflict, displacement, health emergencies, economic downturns and other types of shocks? • Geography: Are they excluded and isolated because of the location or environment they live in? • Socio-Economic Status: Are they disadvantaged in terms of income, life expectancy, access to education, and clean water and sanitation; or chances to stay healthy and be well-nourished? • Governance: Are institutions, laws and processes ineffective, unjust, inequitable, or discriminatory?
ANALYSE	Work with and accompany the community to identify their needs.
	Adopt a layered approach to confirm which groups are furthest behind in the local context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify those who are likely to be <i>further behind</i> (like women, children, ethnic or religious minorities). • Consider the specific circumstances of those very likely to be <i>furthest behind</i> (like people with disabilities, widows, orphans, street children, the elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS, refugees, or survivors of gender-based violence).
	Identify how they are being left behind and the reasons behind this (who, how, why).
ACCOMPANY	Work with and accompany the furthest behind target groups to identify their priorities and overall needs.
	Where appropriate and possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop specific projects that address the particular rights and priorities of the furthest behind groups. • develop specific components within broader community projects that address the needs of those furthest behind • refer those furthest behind to other agencies that are better placed to support them • provide specific support for them to access other services
	Where it is not possible to prioritise those furthest behind, ensure that they are at least included in the project.
ADDRESS	Work at an appropriate pace that acknowledges the particular context and needs of those furthest behind.
	Recognise the need to implement relatively small-scale projects for furthest behind groups, as necessary.
	Acknowledge the relatively high cost of projects for those furthest behind, so that <i>Value for Money</i> is viewed from a cost-effectiveness perspective (as the optimal use of resources for this particular intervention).
	Be sensitive to local cultural and social issues in the community.
	Be innovative in seeking to address negative cultural or gender barriers.
	Where projects are not specifically focussed on those most marginalised, provide particular incentives and supports to enable at least some furthest behind groups to participate (e.g. in meeting school fees).
ADVO CATE	Support those furthest behind with self-advocacy and system strengthening initiatives.
	Engage in representative advocacy on particular issues at national and / or international level, as appropriate.
ADAPT	Monitor progress of furthest behind groups and adapt interventions to meet their evolving needs over time.
	Build resilience of groups that are particularly vulnerable to shocks arising from man-made or natural disasters.
	Continuously scan and discuss with the community to identify newly vulnerable or marginalised groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to the needs of those suddenly furthest behind due to emergencies (like floods, earthquakes or conflict) • Support people whose circumstances have declined gradually (due to declining incomes or recurring droughts)
	Consider moving on when the situation of previously furthest behind groups has improved significantly and others are now in greater need.

4. Further exploration of the findings

4.1 *Auxilium Reach Out*, India

The Salesian Sisters in northeast India established the *Auxilium Reach Out* project, through which they work with marginalised tribal women and girls, promoting sustainable livelihoods activities, including different vocational training programmes and job placement for youth who have dropped out of school, and adult literacy promotion.

After the launch of the Misean Cara research report in January 2021, the team organised a workshop to assess their own approach to working with those furthest behind, particularly asking:

- Are we faithful to the mandate to ‘save the least and the lost’?
- Do we go in search of the one lost, leaving the other 99? Or are we living in the safe zones, taking care of those in the sheepfold?
- Do we advocate for the most pressing issues of those furthest behind; or are we only tackling what we are comfortable with?
- Are we using all our influence and connections to reach and accompany the most vulnerable people?

Following these guiding questions, the participants used the analysis tool (see page 4 above) to explore each of the 6-As.



Half-day workshop with sisters and selected staff members

The team developed an action plan tailored to their specific circumstances, to ensure that the needs of those furthest behind are being recognised and addressed along each of the steps of the project cycle. This includes, amongst others, a review of the needs of all people within their geographic reach, bringing these findings to the local, state

and central governments, and training local leaders to self-advocate for the change they wish to see.

4.2 Public Learning Event

Misean Cara organised a virtual public learning event in late April 2021 to share the research findings within the missionary community and wider development sector.

During the event, Sr. Josephine McCarthy (Misean Cara Board member) introduced the MADI Framework, followed by Mike Williams (consultant) who presented the research findings on how missionaries reach those furthest behind. During the subsequent panel discussion, Sr. Rosemary Oduol (FMSA), Sr. Aruna George (Good Shepherd Sisters), Eamonn Brehony (independent consultant) and John Moffett (Misean Cara) offered their views on the research and how the framework is applicable to their work and to the work of missionaries in general.



Participants’ associations with reaching those furthest behind

A fruitful discussion arose around the question of how the missionaries’ long-term commitment relates to the localisation agenda. It was stated that missionaries work very closely with the local population to ensure community ownership of the projects. In seeking always to reach those furthest behind, missionaries’ presences in the communities they serve tend to evolve rather than end.

“Missionaries have an ‘evolution’ strategy rather than an exit strategy.”

Quote on the day

About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development organisation made up of 88 member organisations working with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in over 50 countries in the Global South. 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 allows for rapid, efficient and targeted responses.

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.

Misean Cara gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Irish Aid.



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