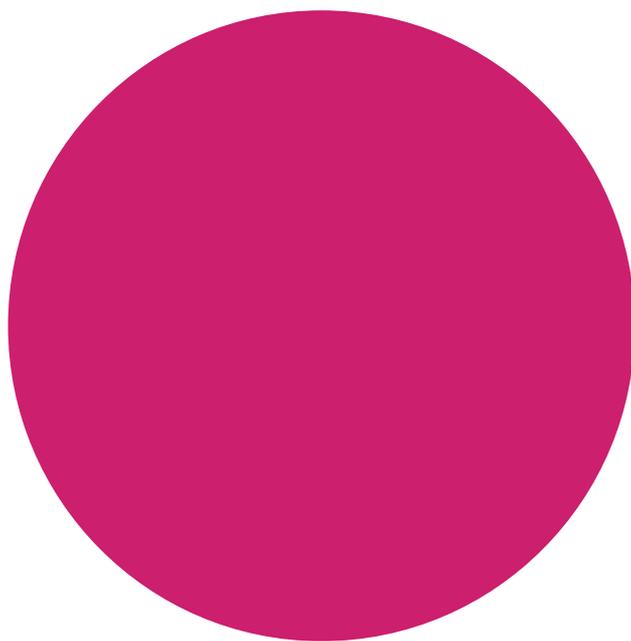


Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2018/04

Investing in Capacity

Supporting Local Project Teams in Misean Cara
Member Organisations



misean cara
Mission Support from Ireland

1. Introduction

In the words of Peter Drucker, management is doing things right, while leadership is doing the right thing. For Misesan Cara, there is no doubt that its member organisations are demonstrating leadership by doing the right thing in dozens of countries around the world. But there is also a strong emphasis on good management, on doing things right, ensuring that the best possible outcomes are achieved for marginalised and vulnerable communities in developing countries.

On an annual basis, through its members, Misesan Cara adopts a project approach to support over 250 development and humanitarian interventions across the globe. The hierarchy of a member organisation usually consists of a global leadership structure, individual country leadership teams, then project-level implementation teams. For Misesan Cara, the capacity development of member organisations is a key factor in doing things right. Within this, a strong, well-resourced and well-managed project team is key to project success.

A 2015-2016 Learning Review¹ of Misesan Cara supports to the capacity development of a number of members found that the funding was “vital to catalysing, scaling up and/or maintaining momentum on organisational capacity development”. The same report quotes the view of James & Hailey (2009) that donors should show willingness to support “ongoing implementation of a change process” to balance a general “over-emphasis on accounting for resources rather than ensuring the overall mission is achieved”.²

This Learning Brief describes a number of initiatives used by Misesan Cara to develop and further strengthen the abilities of local project teams, with the overall objective of delivering positive and sustainable change in the lives of the people with whom they work.

¹ The Learning Review was carried out by Eamonn Casey

² James, R. and Hailey, J., (2007) Capacity Building for NGOs – Making it Work, INTRAC Praxis Series No. 2, Oxford, UK: International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC).

2. Supporting Members and Project Teams

2.1 Funding for Member Capacity Development

From its foundation, Misesan Cara has been committed to developing the capacity of its member organisations. One of the objectives in the organisation’s Strategic Plan 2013-2016 was to further enhance the professional expertise and technical systems of members, while Goal Five of the current Strategy 2017-2021 is to enhance and promote the Missionary Approach to Development.³

In 2014, Misesan Cara developed a Capacity Development Policy which embraced the OECD definition of capacity development as “the process whereby people, organisations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time”.⁴ It recognises existing capacities already in place and seeks to augment those through a mix of support initiatives. The Policy views the development of capacity as more than a means to an end, but also as a legitimate end in itself.

Misesan Cara continues to set aside funds to strength the project management capacity of member organisations. For example, in 2017 €536,017 was allocated to 28 capacity development projects for 21 members in 33 countries. Capacity development funding is used to support a range of initiatives at different levels within an organisation, including strategic planning, organisational development and (see Box 1) the development of expertise in project cycle and results-based management.

³ For a description of the Missionary Approach to Development Interventions, see Misesan Cara Learning Brief 2018/02, at www.miseancara.ie/public-resources

⁴ OECD, 2006. The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Towards Good Practice. OECD DAC Network on Governance

Box 1- Enhancing Project Management & Results-Based Planning in Uganda

Misean Cara member organisation, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, has two missions in Uganda, one in Mukono (east of Kampala) and the other in Pabo in the north. All of its development activities are carried out through two Community Based Organisations – Children in Need (CHIN) in Mukono and Women and Children First Organisation (WACFO) in Pabo.

In 2017, the member conducted two capacity development initiatives in tandem: an evaluation of each of the two projects and, after the two evaluations, a five-day learning workshop on Results-Based Planning (RBP). The workshop aimed to enhance capacity at project team level by providing skills and tools to think strategically and holistically about how to achieve change in communities. The findings and learning from the evaluations of the two development projects supported the RBP workshop participants in linking their learning about results with practical application on the ground.

Eleven people from WACFO and eight from CHIN, from across all levels of those organisations, took part in the training, increasing the impact of learning across the organisations and ensuring support for embedding and institutionalising that learning at organisational level.

According to a representative of the Sisters, the workshop had a positive impact on the project staff and on their systems in Uganda. There is a greater understanding of and concentration on project planning. More thought and time are spent on identifying and reporting on higher-level indicators that demonstrate clearly the differences the interventions are making.

2.2 The Missionary Development Officer

Each of Misean Cara’s member organisations appoints a Missionary Development Officer (MDO), who is based in Ireland, to act as liaison between the member’s project teams and Misean Cara staff. In by far the majority of cases, MDOs themselves have worked in developing countries and can also draw on their own experience to support project teams.

Misean Cara provides induction to newly-appointed MDOs through an annual five-day course, and ongoing training on organisational policies, systems and processes (for example, on the range of funding schemes available to members, and on the use of the online project proposal and reporting resource). MDOs are in a

key position to support project teams as they develop proposals and report on achievements.

Missionary Development Officers also conduct monitoring trips to member projects; in 2017, 125 projects implemented by 21 members were visited across 29 countries. As with the monitoring programme conducted by Misean Cara staff, these visits are seen as learning and capacity building opportunities for all concerned.

“As an MDO, I see my role as developing the institutional capacity of project teams in their development activities”.

Connie O’Halloran, MDO with the Spiritan Fathers

2.3 Misean Cara’s Mentorship Programme

Background to the Programme

Misean Cara’s mentorship programme was initiated in December 2012. The programme has grown over the years, and now involves a network of four mentors based in Africa (in Accra, Pretoria and Nairobi) and Latin America (in Lima), providing project management support to member organisations in a total of 35 countries. Topics of support range across the project cycle. The programme has evolved organically in a demand-led way, and now extends to five strategic support areas:

1. Planning, proposal development and the Misean Cara Quality Support Initiative
2. Processes and systems used in project implementation and monitoring by members
3. Reporting requirements for Misean Cara-funded projects and the demonstration of results achieved
4. Broader organisational strengthening and project team development
5. Improving coherence with external institutional frameworks and leveraging wider change

In 2017, the four mentors made a total of 237 mentorship visits to project teams across 57 members.



In Kasungu District, Malawi, Misesan Cara member organisation the Jesuit Missions is working with rural communities to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. In the photo, Development Mentor for Southern Africa, Andrea Cortemiglia (right), meets community members during a visit with the project team. Photo: Misesan Cara

Evaluating the Programme

The mentorship programme was evaluated in 2015/2016 by Cathy Doran, with the principal purpose of assessing the member organisations' experience of the support provided by the mentors. In late 2016 and early 2017, consultant Mike Williams conducted effectiveness reviews of eleven health or education projects in three countries (South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya). The projects visited had all availed of support from Misesan Cara in the preparation of their funding proposals, either through initial contact with the mentor, or through Misesan Cara's Quality Support Initiative (QSI), a mechanism whereby projects that are viewed as potentially strong are assisted in developing a rationale and associated proposal for funding. A thematic report on capacity development was also produced as part of this effectiveness review exercise.

Both reports assert that the provision of mentoring or capacity development support resulted in improvements in project cycle management. Two quotes in particular bear this out:

"... there are high levels of self-reported increased knowledge and skills in planning and proposal writing among project teams. This has led to [an] enhanced quality of applications" (Doran, 2016)

"... there was a notable improvement in the quality of project proposals where a medium or high level of support was provided". (Williams, 2017)

Doran also noted "the shift in Misesan Cara's organisational culture to one that now provides greater capacity development support and accompaniment to members along the entire project cycle, when compared with the former tendency to focus on the planning stage". This was echoed by Williams, who stated that "[t]he success of mentoring support at the reporting stage suggests that [members] would gain significant benefits from seeking mentoring support more proactively beyond the initial application stage".

"No case was identified where a significant level of support was provided, and that support had no effect". (Williams, 2017)

Far more often than not, Misesan Cara's mentors work at the project level, their primary relationship being with the project teams. While this is entirely appropriate, Doran makes the point that "if capacity development is to be sustained in the longer term, more work is required at both the organisational and institutional levels", so that systems and processes are put in place for the future. "Overall, increasing effectiveness [of the mentorship programme] requires taking a broader look at multiple capacities and multiple levels (individual, organisational and institutional)". (Doran, 2016)

"Some of the qualities respondents used to describe their mentors include 'patient', 'approachable' and 'encouraging'". (Doran, 2016)

What Project Teams Said

The results of a more recent 2017 survey of 101 project teams across 25 countries further testify to the value of the work done by the mentors. The following feedback is representative of the overall response.

Great learning and insights in developing organisational standard business plan and solid organisational structures. Our mentor is very simple, humble and gentle in dealing with our organisation and always ready to assist where help is required.

Misesan Cara Project Team Survey, 2017

It was wonderful to have access to our mentor as we prepared our major multiyear grant proposal in 2017. I was able to check regarding Misesan Cara process and procedures and he also provided some valuable feedback on the content of the proposal before we submitted it. He was accessible, approachable and always willing to assist.

Misesan Cara Project Team Survey, 2017



Paul Gichuki, Misesan Cara Development Mentor for East Africa (left), discussing a project proposal with Spiritan Fr. Boniface Muema. The Sustainable Agriculture Project brings together seven Misesan Cara member organisations working with vulnerable communities in three countries in East Africa (Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda). Project components include water supply, sanitation, sustainable agriculture and income generation. Photo: Misesan Cara

2.4 Using Project Evaluations as Learning Opportunities

It is Misesan Cara’s policy to conduct up to four external evaluations per year. These typically involve a number of different projects, are normally thematic in nature (e.g., Resilience & Recovery, Girls’ Education, Peace-building) and multi-country in scope. Misesan Cara adopts a highly collaborative approach to the management of evaluations. The most important principle informing the design and execution of an evaluation is that it be a learning opportunity for all concerned – evaluators, Misesan Cara staff in Ireland, the personnel of member organisations and, in particular, the relevant project teams.

Discussions with representatives of the member organisations prior to the evaluation stress this learning focus, but the adoption of such an approach does not diminish to any degree the rigour of the evaluation process.

An initial selection of themes, countries and projects is based on organisational strategic priorities and the need for geographical, thematic and member spread over time. Members are then consulted regarding the logistics of field work and the availability of key staff, while representatives of member organisations are invited to participate in an inception meeting with the consultant(s).

The deliverables required from an evaluation underline the learning focus, with evaluators required to produce an individual report for each project included in the exercise, again with an emphasis on learning. Drafts of these individual reports are shared with the project teams concerned before being finalised for sharing with Misesan Cara. An overarching document is also produced, with the title of this document, Thematic Learning Report, reinforcing the focus of the evaluation. The members involved in the evaluation are invited to comment on this report, and to participate in a validation meeting, before it is finalised.



Thematic Learning Reports from External Evaluations of Misesan Cara-funded projects

For the members involved, this level of consultation creates a high degree of ownership of the outcomes of the evaluation. Further underlining the principle of learning, results have in recent years been summarised in a series of Learning Briefs.

2.5 Sector-Based Communities

For each of Misesan Cara’s thematic strategic goals (in education, health, livelihoods and human rights), and for Capacity Development, there is a Sector-Based Community (SBC) which provides a forum where representatives of member organisations with a particular interest and expertise in the sector concerned can get together, share experiences, discuss issues of common concern and hear about innovations. SBC meetings are organised at a country level by the Development Mentors and in Ireland by Misesan Cara Project Officers. Peer-to-peer exposure visits to member projects are often arranged as part of SBC country-level meetings.



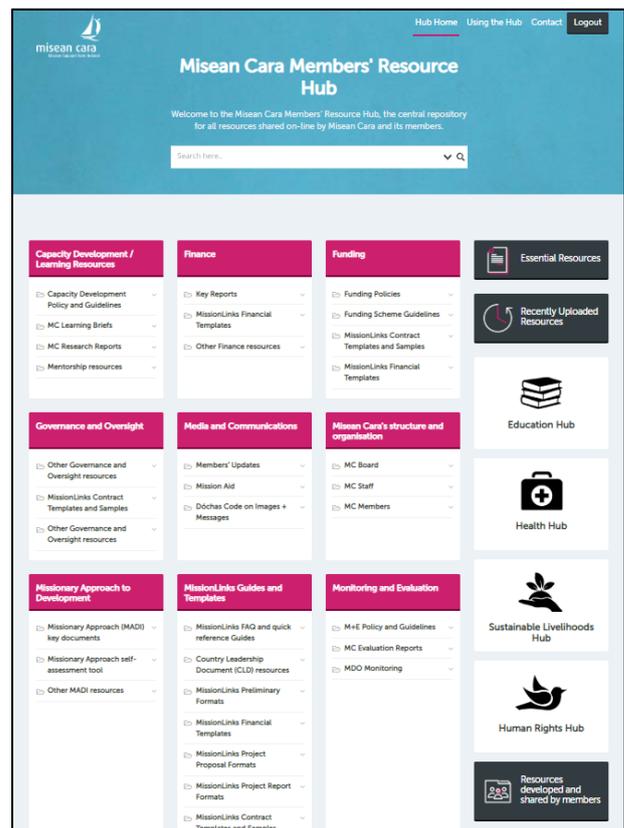
Misesan Cara Latin America MDO Christian Guzmán addressing project teams in Lima as part of a Sector-Based Community meeting in 2018.

In Ireland, SBC meetings are attended by Missionary Development Officers. Learning and outcomes from these meetings can be shared by the MDOs with all project teams, providing an opportunity for the dissemination of new ideas and best practice.

2.6 Misesan Cara Online Knowledge Hub

An internal IT-based Knowledge Hub was rolled out by Misesan Cara in March 2018. Available to all MDOs and project staff, it is a repository of resources for all aspects of project cycle management and organisational development, containing policy documents, templates and examples of good practice.

Initial reaction to the availability of this resource has been hugely positive. Project teams can be certain that the most recent versions of policies and templates are available to them whenever needed, while in time useful documents from other Misesan Cara member organisations, and from other development actors, will provide up-to-date information on best development practice.



Screen shot of Misesan Cara’s Members’ Knowledge Hub. The facility is available free to Misesan Cara Project Managers, MDOs and support staff throughout the world. Access is through a secure link on Misesan Cara’s website.

3. Conclusion

For many development and humanitarian interventions, the project team remains the basic unit and mechanism for delivering change. Even interventions framed as broad integrated programmes rely more often than not on project teams for the implementation of individual components. Enhancing the capacity of such teams contributes to the quality of project work, and to the attainment of positive outcomes for beneficiary communities. Indeed, capacity development can have far-reaching and long-term benefits given that many of the individuals and teams concerned may continue to contribute to wider development processes well beyond the life-span of the initial capacity development input.

This Learning Brief has described Mísean Cara’s multi-faceted approach to the capacity development of teams implementing projects in developing countries, which has been refined

based on insights gleaned from various evaluations and from practice. The approach is informed by Mísean Cara’s vision, mission, values, structure and way of working. It will continue to evolve. From Mísean Cara’s experience, any approach to capacity development needs to consist of a wide range of complementary elements which address different aspects of project management in the first instance, but which also focus on wider organisational development so that projects are being implemented in an enabling organisational environment.

Other development agencies will adopt strategies for capacity development that are appropriate to their respective ways of working. It is Mísean Cara’s hope that this document will contribute to the general discussion on investing in capacity and the key enabling factor it often proves to be in the delivery of positive development results for communities in developing countries.

About Mísean Cara

Established in 2004, Mísean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development movement made up of 91 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.

Mísean 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:

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

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

Mísean Cara Learning Briefs

This is one of a series of Learning Briefs produced by Mísean Cara with a view to promoting learning and contributing to discourse within the development sector. The Briefs are based on monitoring, evaluation and research work done for Mísean Cara. Previous issues cover topics such as education, health, project evaluation, women’s empowerment and the response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. All Learning Briefs are available at www.miseancara.ie/public-resources.

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