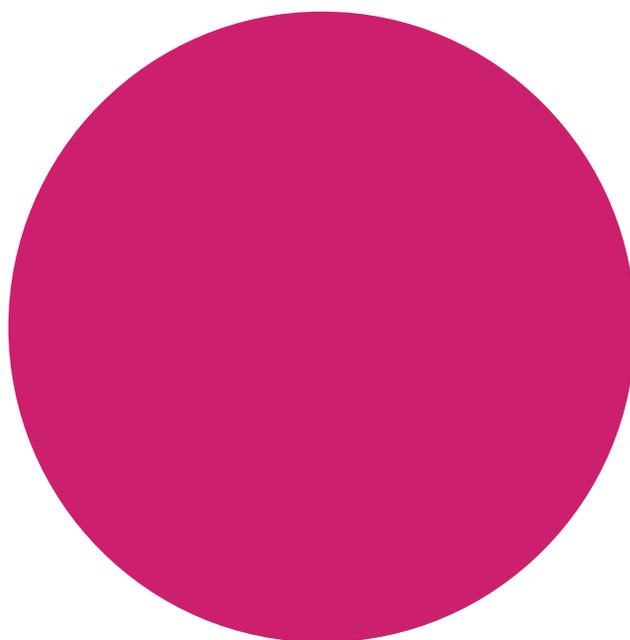


Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2018/06

Facilitating the Journey to Transformation

Findings and Lessons from a Meta-Evaluation of
Misean Cara Project Evaluations



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Mission Support from Ireland

1. Introduction

In its Monitoring & Evaluation Policy, Misesan Cara assigns primary responsibility for project evaluation to the Misesan Cara member with whom the funding contract is signed. Projects that have been funded for three consecutive years, or projects with an annual budget greater than €50,000, or projects presented as multi-annual, are required to carry out evaluations at an appropriate time. The 2018 meta-evaluation involved gathering reports of evaluations conducted over the period 2011-2018. Of these, 47 were scrutinised in detail, with the results of that scrutiny forming the findings of the meta-evaluation. This Learning Brief presents some highlights from the final report.

The 47 projects were implemented across 20 countries by 27 of Misesan Cara's 91 member organisations, while the evaluations were conducted by 42 different individuals or teams. Thirty-one of the evaluations were on education projects, fourteen were on health projects and two on human rights.

This Learning Brief presents a summary of the major insights in the final report of the meta-evaluation.

2. Findings

2.1 Project Achievements

Based on the reading of the 47 reports, the meta-evaluation concluded that Misesan Cara member organisations in the Global South are implementing quality projects that have brought real change to the lives of poor, marginalised and vulnerable people, in some cases over many years. Quality education and health care services have been delivered to many people, often to those most marginalised such as children with disabilities and people living with HIV and AIDS.

2.2 Project Assessment

Given the variety of evaluators, there was no uniform approach to rating the projects evaluated. In order to give some sense of comparison across the range, however, as part of the meta-evaluation each project was assigned a rating based on the traffic light system originally developed by the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact.¹ Forty-three of the 47 projects were rated Green or Green/Amber, meaning either very few or some improvements were needed in the project. The remaining four were given a rating of Amber/Red, indicating that significant improvements were necessary.

2.3 OECD-DAC Criteria

While Misesan Cara's M&E Policy does not insist on a specific approach, 20 of the 47 evaluations were structured on the five OECD Development Assistance Committee criteria for project assessment: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The table below summarises the results.

Criterion	No. of Projects Meeting Criterion
Relevance	19
Efficiency	13
Effectiveness	17
Impact	17
Sustainability	3
Total Projects	20

It is clear from the evaluators' findings that the projects were highly relevant, effective and impactful, and that the most significant challenge was in the area of sustainability. Closer investigation, however, revealed that in the majority of cases, it was the sustainability of the *project* that was assessed, not the sustainability of the impact on the lives of individuals. This was especially the case for health and education projects, where interventions can have a transformative effect on those reached.

¹ Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 2011. ICAI's Approach to Effectiveness and Value for Money, ICAI Report 1, November 2011, London.

Misean Cara members encounter constantly the challenge of balancing the financial sustainability of their project with the goal of reaching and serving the poorest and most marginalised populations.

2.4 Evidence of the Missionary Approach

Misean Cara is interested in the approach to development and humanitarian work adopted by its member organisations, and has investigated it quite intensely in recent years.² The Terms of Reference of the meta-evaluation asked that evidence of the Approach be sought in the reports examined. There is evidence in abundance of the five features of the Approach: crossing boundaries, making a long-term commitment, bearing personal witness, expressing a prophetic vision and adopting a holistic approach.

Missionary projects crossed boundaries of language, religion, stigma and culture. In many cases, the multiple dimensions of a project indicated an approach to the whole person, while quite a number of the projects had been in place for over 20 years, evolving to meet needs over time. Some of the five features are evident below in the summary of lessons learned.

3. Nine Lessons

3.1 Governance

Governance, and the maintenance of key relationships in the oversight, management and implementation of a project are critical in avoiding confusion and wasted effort. A strong Board of Directors is an asset to a project, as in a project in Kenya where the Board consisted of people “knowledgeable in the fields of health, legal affairs, education, human resources and vocational training.” A project in South Sudan needed to change its management structure to improve the dialogue between the Board and project management personnel while, in another case,

a Memorandum of Understanding was lacking between the Diocese and the missionary organisation that was running a particular project, leading to confusion in relation to roles and responsibilities.

Box 1 – Taking a Long-term Approach – Building Hope, Justice and Peace in South-Eastern DRC

When the Good Shepherd Sisters arrived for the first time in Kolwezi, Lualaba Province, south-eastern DRC, in March 2012, it was not with any degree of fanfare, or even with a particular thematic project in mind. The three sisters in the first group, two from Kenya and one from Singapore, were taking the long view, and spent the first year visiting people in their own homes. They became known as the “walking Sisters”, as they had no vehicle, and the humble approach they took led to the development of strong and trusting relationships with the community. Then, when they felt the time was right, they started a detailed consultation process, talking to hundreds of community members and engaging a range of stakeholders. The result was a multi-dimensional intervention: initiatives in alternative livelihoods, economic empowerment, child protection, civil society strengthening and community mobilisation formed a programme aimed at the equitable participation of women, girls and children in Congolese society. A final area of endeavour was focussed on developing the capacities of the programme team so as to ensure quality implementation.

3.2 A long-term perspective

This is inherent in the Missionary Approach to Development, and the notion of living in solidarity is a core principle. Many of the projects included in the meta-evaluation involve a missionary presence of more than ten years, with one of fifty and two of twenty-five. Missionaries are not a transient presence, but become part of the fabric of a community. This allows an informed and compassionate understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and communities. The long-term perspective does not, however, require the

² See Misean Cara Learning Brief 2018/02: Missionary Approach to Development Interventions at <http://www.miseancara.ie/public-resources/>

passage of time to develop – it can be embraced from the inception of a project, as the example in Box 1 shows.

3.3 Questions of Sustainability

The results shown in Section 2.3 suggest, at first glance, that 85% of the 20 evaluations conducted using the OECD-DAC criteria were judged to be unsustainable. As pointed out above, however, it was the sustainability of the intervention that was being assessed, rather than the long-term benefit of an education or a health treatment, e.g., in providing a girl with education, or in preventing the transmission of the HIV virus to a baby born to a HIV+ mother. The evaluation reports show that Misesan Cara's members are deeply concerned about the long-term sustainability of their project activities. This consideration, however, does not prevent them from responding to the urgent and immediate needs of poor people so that they can live a dignified life.

“One of the major challenges facing the project is sustainability. This is a concern for everyone and especially for the sisters They are trying to strike a balance between sustainability and ensuring that the most vulnerable and marginalized have access to opportunities to improve their life.”

Health project, Kenya

3.4 A Holistic Approach

Underlining another feature of the missionary approach, nine of the 47 projects involved multi-dimensional responses to the challenges faced by communities, incorporating health, education, livelihoods and human rights initiatives. The different aspects of a particular project were emphasised to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the circumstances. Clients of a missionary-run health centre in Zambia noted how staff at the centre treated them with “love, care and dignity”. In a HIV project in Kenya, mothers who were reached as part of an initiative to prevent mother-to-

child transmission of the virus were invited to join a group receiving psycho-social support. The project also started group savings and loans schemes to promote income generation.

Box 2 – Working Towards Sustainability – HIV & AIDS project, Zambia

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters), have run an integrated HIV & AIDS health care project in Lukulu, Zambia since 2006. The project has four principal components: a voluntary counselling & testing centre for HIV; a home-based care (HBC) programme; a programme providing milk to babies born to HIV+ women; and the production of high-energy protein supplements for a variety of clients.

The sustainability of project initiatives is of paramount importance to the project team. Some activities are still donor dependent and will remain so for some time. The project is seeking a balance between meeting the immediate needs of people now while working towards sustainability in the longer term. Progress is being made. In January 2013, the idea arose of running a small tuck-shop as a means of generating an income for the HBC programme. The proximity of three schools to the health care centre was a critical element in the business plan for the shop. Four years on and staffed by a team of volunteer carers, the shop is thriving, and the HBC programme is fully funded from the profits being generated.

The project has brought other, initially unintended, benefits to many in the local community of Lukulu. In 2014, the project purchased an oil press to produce oil for its soap-making venture. Villagers now grow the jatropha plant and sell the seeds to the project. In addition, local farmers have increased their production of soya beans to sell to the project as raw material for the high-energy protein supplements. This integration into the local economy further bolsters the sustainability of the project.

3.5 Following Up

It is important that project inputs are not delivered in isolation, and that, in addition to providing an input at a point in time,

something is done to ensure there is sustained benefit from it. One recommendation from the evaluation of a training project in the Sudan was that course graduates should be provided with a start-up grant in order to be able to establish a small business and put their new skills to immediate use. In a training project in Malawi, it was noted that trainers maintained contact with and provided ongoing support to graduates.

In the case of health, follow-up is also important. The evaluation report on one health project expressed concern about the termination of support after a short period, noting that children often returned to the same nutritional status as prior to the initial intervention.

3.6 Collecting Data

The availability of accurate and comprehensive data is critical in the evaluation of development and humanitarian interventions. Strategic and operational discussions can be enriched by such data, and any decisions made will have a practical basis in fact. To enable this, a project needs a robust monitoring and evaluation system, incorporating the regular and systematic gathering of data. One evaluation found that “[d]ata management is a clear challenge in the facility. It was difficult to get all the data in good time, and data that we could validate and that was well disaggregated in gender and age”. In another, the lack of documentation on the activities of former students was found to be a major constraint to the evaluation itself.

3.7 The Importance of Coordination

As mentioned above, missionary interventions are frequently multi-dimensional, in keeping with the holistic approach to development adopted. People reached through one initiative can be introduced to and benefit from others. An evaluation report from Uganda noted that “the greatest effectiveness and efficiency is achieved when there is good coordination between individual projects”. Coordination, however, sometimes proved a

challenge. One evaluator remarked that project reporting was based on individual donor grants, leading to a fragmented view of the overall intervention. Another report noted that “[m]ultiple program implementation channels had the potential of causing confusion in the community [and] of overstretching the community with multiple activities if not well coordinated”.

3.8 Parents, Guardians and Carers

Where children are the principal target group in a project, the involvement of their parents, guardians or carers is critical to ensure long-term benefit from the intervention. An evaluation in Peru concluded that the biggest challenge in the project was the integration of parents into the educational process of their children, adding that there was a “lack of sustained support for learning at home”. An evaluation in DRC found that, in a child protection initiative, regular home visits and follow-up were the key to success: when a child was missing from school, the home was visited at the latest by the third day.

3.9 Investment in Infrastructure

Fifteen of the evaluations were of projects that involved the construction of infrastructure or the purchase or maintenance of essential equipment. It is clear from reading the evaluation reports that the delivery of a quality service, e.g., in health or education, requires an appropriate infrastructure. In a school in Zambia, the installation of an industrial generator resulted in uninterrupted learning and the elimination of teacher absenteeism. In two schools in Sierra Leone, the construction of science laboratories, IT suites and libraries created “a learning environment appropriate to a proper second-level educational establishment”.

Having appropriate infrastructure, combined with an increase in staff numbers, also eliminated the need for teachers to work a “double shift”, delivering the same classes to groups of students in the morning and

Box 3 – The Benefits of Good Infrastructure – The Ruben Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

In the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, the informal settlement of Mukuru, home to approximately 450,000 people, is an area characterised by temporary dwellings and poor infrastructure. In this environment, the Ruben Centre, established and run by Misesan Cara member organisation Edmund Rice Development, stands in marked contrast to its surroundings. This is very much a positive, according to a recent evaluation:

The Centre is located in the slum, which is a contrast [to] the Ruben Centre. The slum is characterized by dirt, pollution, foul smells, congestion and waste all over the place. But the Centre depicts a sense of order, structure, care for environment and proper sanitation. The whole Ruben community takes great pride in this oasis characterized by art works, cleanliness and plants. The school has an environment club that keeps the place in good shape, a young farmers club where gardening thrives and an art club to brighten the place.

Evidence suggests that infrastructural development and organizational capacity attracted more beneficiaries in to the Centre’s services especially in the primary school. The new state of the art school led to improved enrolment and also attracted more development partners.



The well-constructed, solid buildings of the Ruben Centre contrast with the general infrastructure in Mukuru kwa Ruben



afternoon, so that “the teaching staff are no longer overcome by chronic exhaustion and at last have a working pattern which permits proper preparation of classes”.

In a health clinic, the installation of solar power meant that the cold chain for vaccines could be maintained, eliminating wastage, and the clinic could open two hours earlier each day. In general, infrastructure enables the long-term delivery of quality services.

4. Conclusions

The meta-evaluation yielded a wealth of insights and lessons under sixteen different headings, with just the highlights of the final report being presented in this Learning Brief.

Affirming the dignity of each unique individual, missionaries respond to the immediate needs of the person as a primary imperative. The meta-evaluation concluded that, throughout the Global South, Misesan Cara member organisations are implementing quality projects that are bringing real change to the lives of vulnerable people. Project success is being enabled by the Missionary Approach to Development, involving as it does a holistic approach within a long-term perspective.

“We merely facilitate people’s journey to transformation”

Missionary Staff member, Uganda

While there are challenges in certain areas such as the sustainability of project activities and the systematic management of project data, the transformative nature of the work being done is also evident.



Capturing the Learning: Misesan Cara members and staff discussing the penultimate draft of the meta-evaluation report, December 2018

About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean 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.

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:

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 sees Misean Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on five groups: women, children, refugees, displaced people and people with disabilities.

Misean Cara Learning Briefs

This is one of a series of Learning Briefs produced by Misean 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 Misean 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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