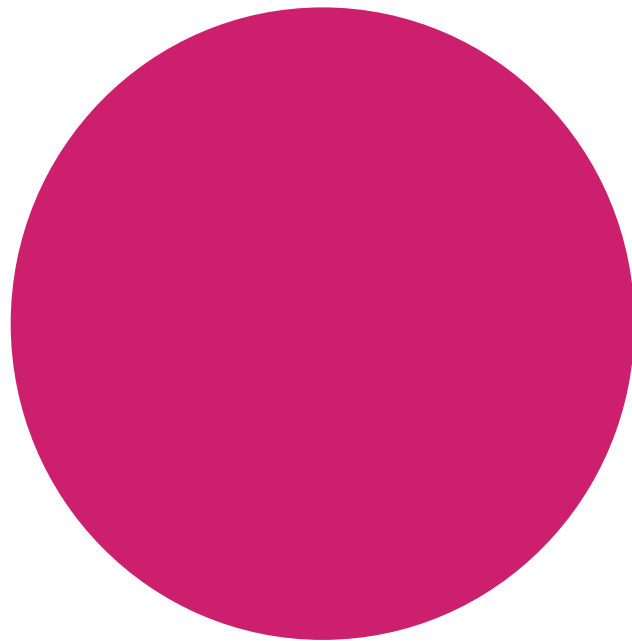


Delivering Transformation through Missionary Organisations



“Centuries before a free and independent Irish nation sent her first ambassadors around the world, we were privileged to have the best unpaid ambassadors in our Irish missionaries.”

*President Mary McAleese
Nairobi, Kenya, 2001*

1 Introduction

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 in the Global South. Mísean Cara exists as a result of the Irish missionary tradition which had its first flourishing in Europe between the sixth and ninth centuries and experienced a second wave of activity, on a much more global scale, from the nineteenth century onwards. In many instances, missionaries paved the way, perhaps inadvertently, for official development aid programmes.

“Ireland’s relationship with Africa – and beyond – often began with the work of Irish missionary organisations. Irish Aid continues to support their work through Mísean Cara. I am conscious too that many of the civil society organisations Ireland supports have their origins in people first exposed to global poverty by missionaries.”

Minister of State Ciarán Cannon, launching Irish Aid’s 2016 Annual Report, 2017

Today, Mísean Cara members continue that tradition, working in education, health, livelihoods, human rights and humanitarian

response across Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Though providing members with funding for approximately 250 projects each year, Mísean Cara is aware that this represented only a fraction of the total development work being done by missionary organisations throughout the world. A survey of member organisations undertaken between October 2018 and March 2019 provided additional insight into the broader scale of that work. This Learning Brief presents some of the findings of that survey and describes Mísean Cara’s approach to working with and for its members. What is most striking is the availability of the worldwide missionary movement as an effective and efficient vehicle for the delivery of development and humanitarian interventions.

2 The Global Missionary Network

The majority of Mísean Cara’s members were founded in the nineteenth century, with around a quarter being established before that (see Figure 1). Members of these organisations who are involved in development and humanitarian work can, literally, draw on the wisdom of the ages for guidance. Generations of experience inform the approaches adopted in projects today.

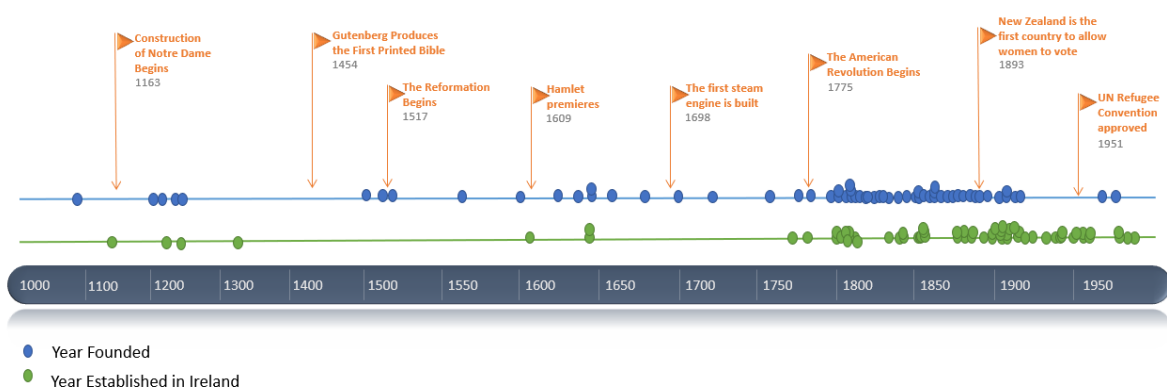


Figure 1 - Dates of Foundation of Mísean Cara Members

Because of the many diverse structures and governance arrangements, not all members were able to respond to all questions in the 2018-2019 Misesan Cara member organisation survey. Information from 67 of the 91 members revealed over 103,000 active personnel worldwide. There are an additional 13,500 in formation, highlighting the overall health of the movement at a global level.

The areas of activity ranged from education, health, water and sanitation to livelihoods, human rights, justice & peace and humanitarian work. Some members have a particular emphasis on specific topics such as Christian-Muslim dialogue and reconciliation, prison chaplaincy & prisoners' rights, people living with disabilities, human trafficking and indigenous peoples.

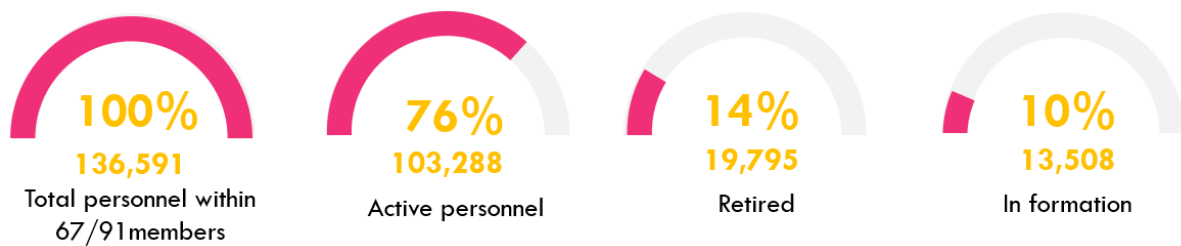


Figure 2 - Personnel in Misesan Cara Member Organisations, based on information from 67 of 91 members

Information from 60 members showed that approximately €300 million is spent annually on over 2,300 development and humanitarian projects using funding from a wide range of sources, of which Misesan Cara is only one. Twenty of Misesan Cara's members have development programme budgets in excess of €1 million per year, indicating an established capacity to manage project interventions while also meeting the ever-increasing requirements of the wider development sector.

Eighteen Misesan Cara members hold observer status at ECOSOC, the UN Economic and Social Council and maintain a presence in Geneva or New York. Being linked into the UN structure allows them to facilitate the participation in UN-related events of representatives from the grassroots organisations that work with their organisations in the Global South. This enables voices from the margins to be heard at the heart of the global human rights architecture.

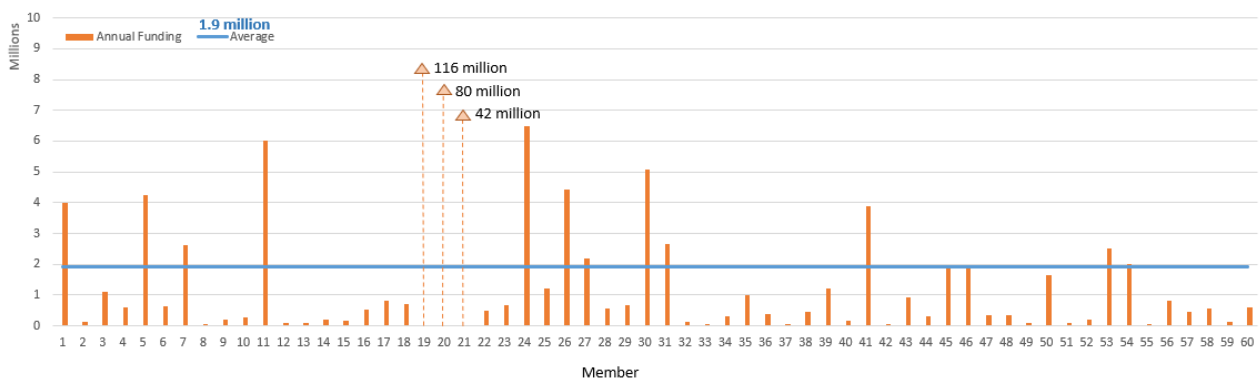


Figure 3 - Annual Development Project Budgets of 60 Members



Marian Belarmino, a young educator involved with the Salesian Sisters in a Youth Empowerment project in the Philippines, participates in a side event at the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, March 2017. The project trains young activists on how to bring their concerns to an international level. Photo: Salesian Sisters.

The diversity of Misesan Cara’s membership is another notable feature. While sixteen members were founded in Ireland, the remainder were founded elsewhere before eventually arriving in Ireland.

Thirty members were founded in France, while 14 were founded in Italy, ten in England or Scotland, four in Spain and two in the Netherlands. Others were founded in Algeria, Belgium, modern-day Israel, India, Nigeria, Uganda and the United States. This diversity is even more marked today.

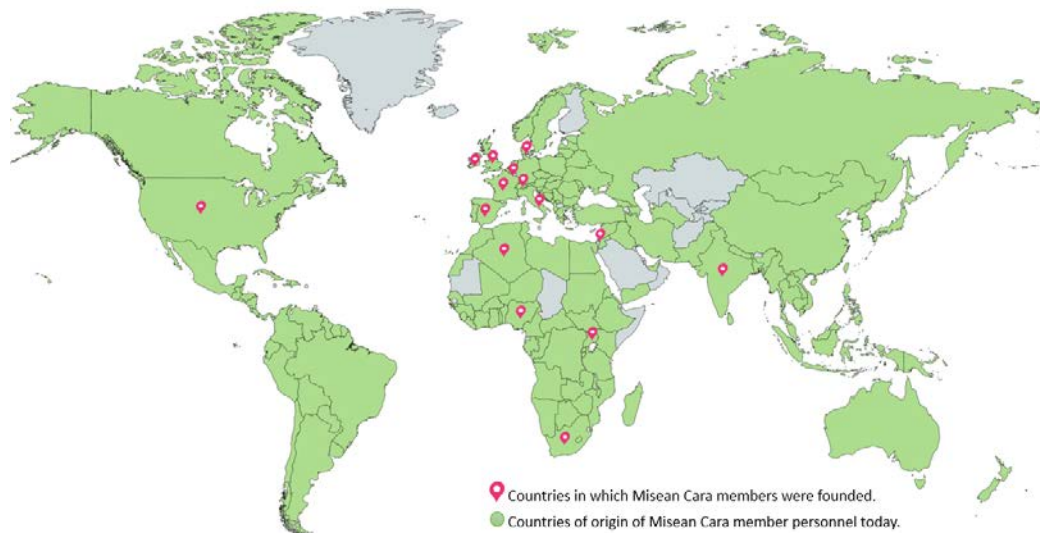


Figure 4 - The global nature of the Misesan Cara movement today

Sixty members provided information on the country of birth of their personnel today, with a total of 175 countries represented. One member can count 126 different nationalities among its personnel. Another is working in 81 countries, and yet another in 82.

“The gift of internationality in our congregation brings with it a broadening of vision and a deeper sense of community with the world.”

From the website of a Misesan Cara member

The website of one member is available in six different languages, while another has 40 different nationalities in its personnel and is present in 37 countries. This is reflective of the role of missionaries as global citizens expressing a shared humanity that transcends national, cultural or linguistic boundaries.

It is striking to note that the above data derives only from missionary organisations that are linked to and funded by Misesan Cara. There are many other missionary organisations, both religious and lay, at work in the Global South.

3 The Missionary Approach

Missionaries have often been referred to as the first development workers and have in many cases been to the forefront of delivering education and health services throughout the world.

It is acknowledged by the State that (the Irish aid programme) was greatly influenced by the work of missionaries in earlier decades. They were the early pioneers who provided services in education and health, in rural development, the provision of drinking water and sanitation services, and tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice.

Mary Robinson¹

Research carried out by Misean Cara between 2016 and 2017 highlighted the unique approach to development adopted by missionary organisations. The key features of the approach, as identified through the research, have been described in a previous Learning Brief.² In summary, these are:

- crossing boundaries (of nationality, culture, identity) as part of a global missionary movement, rooted in a shared humanity;
- long-term commitment to presence in a community;
- personal witness of commitment to missionary values, living those values in solidarity with the poor and marginalised;
- prophetic vision, driven by a belief in and a desire for a better life for all; and
- holistic approach, seeing people as dignified human beings, with a wide range of capacities, needs and rights to be addressed.

¹ Foreword to *The Legacy of Irish Missionaries Lives On* (Matt Moran, 2016)

Essentially, the missionary approach is rooted in living in solidarity with a community, coming to understand intimately the challenges people face, and working together to find lasting solutions. It involves affirming the dignity of each individual as someone with needs but also with knowledge and skills that can be harnessed in identifying and implementing solutions.

Each missionary congregation has its own particular charism which guides its daily work, whether this be in education, health, livelihoods, humanitarian response or human rights. The holistic aspect of the missionary approach often means that a project intervention will involve a number of different dimensions. An income generation project could have an element focused on numeracy skills, to enable people to manage a household budget based on new cash income. Within a school, there might be an outreach project working with parents on self-esteem and literacy.

Overall, the approach brings missionaries to respond to development and humanitarian needs in remote, marginalised and otherwise hard-to-reach communities.

4 Delivering Results through the Global Missionary Network

The global missionary movement is a ready-made network which reaches down to community level, capable of delivering life-changing assistance to those most in need. Missionaries speak the language of the people they support, in more than merely a linguistic sense. Relationships of respect, trust and mutual understanding, built up over years of presence, provide the starting point for efficient and effective development or

² LB2018-02 – Missionary Approach to Development, available at <https://www.miseancara.ie/public-resources/>

humanitarian interventions. The long-term personal commitment and prophetic vision inherent in the missionary approach mean also that missionaries are drawn to work in environments and on issues that could be considered risky, for example in conflict zones, on land rights, or in seeking justice for past wrongs. Any sense of danger or fear is countered by the fundamental belief in the rights and dignity of the community among whom the missionaries live.

External evaluations of Mísean Cara's projects have repeatedly endorsed the quality and effectiveness of missionaries' work. The recognition of the role that is played in bringing transformative change to communities in need is evident also in the report on a 2018 review of Ireland's aid programme, carried out by the cross-party Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence.

"The Committee calls on the Government to examine opportunities to increase funding to missionary bodies."

Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence: Review of the Irish Aid Programme, 2018

The scale of the movement is far greater than the physical and financial reach of Mísean Cara. There is ample opportunity for other development organisations and donors to support the work of missionaries. Their inter-generational experience, the sheer scale of numbers among their personnel, and the breadth of involvement from the local to the global combine to ensure the capacity and ability to deliver life-changing interventions in the places of greatest need in the Global South.

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 sees Mísean Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on 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.

Mísean Cara gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Irish Aid.



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