



**misean cara**  
Mission Support from Ireland

# Valuing faith-based non-profits as non-state education actors

A contribution to the Global Education Monitoring (GEM)  
Report dialogue

**Misean Cara Policy Brief No. 1**  
**March 2021**



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

## 1. Introduction

This paper offers input from Misesan Cara faith-based providers of education to some of the questions that are posed by the *Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2021*, as part of its critical analysis of public-private engagement in education and wider discussion on the strengthening of education systems.

The document demonstrates the considerable contribution that faith-based organisations, including Misesan Cara members can and do make in education provision; and it calls for the particularity of non-profit, non-state, public education-supporting actors such as FBOs to be adequately reflected in dialogue and recommendations arising from the GEM Report 2021.

**Sustainable Development Goal 4** aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The importance of education to achieving the Global Goals cannot be underestimated: not only is education a basic human right and a gateway out of poverty, but the effects of education are significant across all development goals and it is a major catalyst for human development.

While some countries are making progress towards SDG4, progress is typically too slow to achieve the targets. In addition, poor and vulnerable countries, communities, and population cohorts continue to be left behind, with dramatic implications for their opportunities in life.

At the time of writing, the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which hit globally in 2020, continues to have a devastating impact on what was already a global learning crisis. At one peak (and hopefully the historic height) of the COVID-19 related social lockdowns, more than 160 countries had mandated some form of school closures for at least 1.5 billion children and youth. Right now, at least a third of the world's schoolchildren – some 463 million children – are unable to access remote learning.

The pandemic has laid bare inequalities in access to education, deficiencies in remote learning, a resurgence of child labour and discrimination against

girls, as well as profound deterioration in children's health, wellbeing, and physical safety.

While COVID-19 has created chaos in the delivery of education throughout the world, Misesan Cara members have been determined, innovative and proactive in finding ways to accompany children through this crisis and to continue to provide a good quality education – including through broadening access to digital learning and supporting home-based education.

The continuing and adapting projects of Misesan Cara<sup>1</sup> members have offered important emotional and psychological support to children and their families. This has been particularly important in contexts where attending school offers students, and girls in particular, some safety from issues like early marriage and child labour.

The **Global Education Monitoring Report 2021**, following a year like no other in life and the education sector, is on the theme Non-State Actors in Education: it promises to “broaden the conversation on the many ways in which non-state actors are involved in education systems”, and to tackle “head on” heated debates about public versus private roles.

## 2. Context

The Concept Note for the GEM Report 2021 sketches some of the roles envisaged for non-state actors, supporting education provision in direct and indirect ways, and seeks to shed light on how different characteristics of non-state actors manifest -- in terms of providers, finance, regulation, innovation, and more.

Not all non-state actors are for-profit, as the concept note for the GEM Report 2021 captures: some are dedicated to searching for solutions to teaching, learning and accountability challenges, to catalysing changes, and to collaborating with and strengthening national education systems.

We offer some thoughts here on content areas being explored in GEM Report 2021, particularly under some of its themes of interest in Section 4. We offer our

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<sup>1</sup> Misesan Cara is a membership organisation of 88 international and Irish FBOs working in over 50 low- and middle-income countries towards achieving the SDGs.

thoughts as a contribution to (and broadening of) the conversation on the pros and cons of non-state actors in education systems, which includes non-profit ones such as faith-based organisations of different denominations.

Misean Cara maintains that education stakeholders, including civil society campaigners supporting public education, should pay more attention to the differences between for-profit and not-for-profit education providers among non-state actors; and should, accordingly, tailor their recommendations (funding, governance, regulation, etc.) to take these differences into account.

We make five recommendations in Section 6 as to how dialogue around the GEM Report 2021, and policy directions emerging, should take account of the particularities, and merits, of faith-based and non-profit education providers who fall within the disparate grouping that GEM describes as non-state.

We look forward to the learnings and recommendations that emerge in the GEM Report, and to considering them in terms of Misean Cara members' educational practice into the future – within their integrated approach (combining faith, good development practice and a focus on rights) to upholding the right to quality education.

### 3. FBOs' special roles

Faith-based services across all denominations are an important element of overall education provision globally, as in different countries and communities in which Misean Cara works. Numbers for Catholic providers give an indication of their importance, while we do not have access to data for other faiths.

According to the *Global Catholic Education Report 2021*, there are 62 million children enrolled in Catholic pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools globally, and an additional 6 million-plus students in Catholic higher education – quite apart from unknown numbers of men and women in non-formal education and functional literacy initiatives. Enrolment in Catholic schools has been growing especially rapidly on the African continent, which now accounts for

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<sup>2</sup> Editorial on 'Education, the Rights of the Child, and Human Development' in *Education as a driver to Integral Growth and Peace: Ethical Reflections on the Right to Education*,

55.3% of all students in Catholic primary schools in the world, it notes.

Globally, seven in 10 students in Catholic primary schools live in low and lower-middle income countries: 40.9% in low income and 29.7% in lower-middle income countries, the report states – with the Catholic Church responding to the rising demand for education in the Global South, and in low-income countries, in line with its mission to serve the poor. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 11.0% of all primary school students are in Catholic schools. In low-income countries, the proportion is 13.7%.

The special contributions from FBOs<sup>2</sup> include:

- The **scale and reach** they offer across educational levels, dozens of countries and contexts
- The generation of significant **budget savings** in education for governments
- **Character formation** and the transmission of values (such as solidarity, respect, pluralism, respect for justice, peace, and the environment) that are vital to sustainable human development
- **Reaching out beyond the norm** to those being left behind, or at risk of being so, whether they are generally vulnerable population cohorts or located in remote, marginalised, informal settlement, or conflict-affected situations.

The *Global Catholic Education Report 2021* cites estimates for 38 countries which suggest that Catholic schools and universities generate annual budget savings for those states alone of more than \$100 billion (in purchasing power parity terms).

### 4. Misean Cara's approach

Misean Cara's support for education provision has three strong dimensions. Firstly, it supports initiatives that make it possible or easier for vulnerable children and adults to access education – including through gap-filling in the system, supplementary education, and bridging initiatives to ease and support entry to formal education. Secondly, it works to increase the quality of education and learning outcomes for students, with a special emphasis on teacher training. With a view to the long term, it also supports projects that contribute to education system strengthening.

Caritas In Veritate Foundation Working Papers, [www.fciv.org](http://www.fciv.org)

Our member organisations in education work across all levels: from early childhood and pre-primary through primary and secondary, vocational, and alternative/ non-formal education, as well as supporting in-service and pre-service teacher training.

Misean Cara's members are moved to provide services to people, groups and areas neglected or disadvantaged by the state in terms of education, and often other basic dimensions of human development, because certain locations or population groupings are favoured (deliberately or otherwise) in the allocation of scarce public resources.

While access and inclusion are often included in different countries' policy documents, they are frequently neglected (or inadequately addressed or resourced) in practice. Equity and quality considerations tend to be imperfect at best for societies 'have nots', not to mention groups more systemically marginalized or excluded (for reasons of origin, ethnicity, caste, language, gender, religion, location or whatever) in certain states.

Among specific groups vulnerable to 'being left behind' in many countries and contexts are women, girls, people with disabilities, refugees, and people forcibly displaced. These are among Misean Cara members' strategic target groups as a result, in line with our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and their principle of Leaving No One Behind.

Those Misean Cara members who are education providers have an increasing focus on promoting and fulfilling the right to education, including awareness-raising and constructive engagement with duty bearers. Frequently, FBOs are engaged with Governments and education authorities at national and district levels on issues of leadership, enabling environment and good practice to collaboratively raise expectations, improve effectiveness, and enhance outcomes.

This means that they are *not motivated by profit but also that they are not following a 'charity' impulse* – despite these being depicted as the motivations of non-state actors in the Concept Note for the GEM 2021 report.

Not being motivated by financial returns, members place high importance on access to and quality of

education; the place of personal development; awareness-raising, sensitisation on and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms; respect for the individual, different community stakeholders (especially any who are marginalised), and cultural dignity; the need for educators to enhance stewardship of the natural environment; and the importance of fostering appreciation for diversity, equity and inclusion in their institutions.

This holistic and transformative orientation coincides with Pope Francis's call in the 2020 Global Compact for Education<sup>3</sup> "for a more open and inclusive education" and to educate young people "to learn to overcome divisions and conflicts, promote hospitality, justice and peace".

## 5. Themes of particular interest for GEM Report 2021

### Right to Education

The Misean Cara members engaged in non-state, faith-based education provision embrace the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 Framework for Action to achieve SDG4, including education as a fundamental human right and an enabling right. They also embrace the goal of universal equal access to inclusive and equitable quality education, and the idea of the state as duty bearer for vindication of the right to education.

They also value the Framework's recognition of the role of civil society actors in realising that right, within an enabling environment of state regulation and norm-setting, inclusive public policy formulation and implementation.

Providing vital public services is typically seen as the responsibility of the state, as part of their vindication of human rights. In practice, however, many states are unable or unwilling to provide for Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) Rights, in education as in other sectors. This is often especially the case for marginalised or excluded groups, in conflict or post-conflict areas, or in isolated rural or informal/unrecognised urban settlements.

Misean Cara members respond by seeking transformative change in the situations of poor and

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<sup>3</sup> [Global Compact on Education | www.educationglobalcompact.org](https://www.educationglobalcompact.org)

vulnerable people, helping to provide access to quality education services where government duty bearers are unable or unwilling to do so -- or to do so equitably for specific vulnerable or excluded cohorts. In different situations, FBOs also support communities by providing 'catch up' education, supplementary support inside or out of school, or emergency education in times of social or humanitarian crisis, to allow people 'bridge to' or return to, the formal system.

Additionally, Misesan Cara members work for systemic change in policy and practice (locally, nationally, or internationally as the situation demands and allows) in the interest of vindicating people's rights to education. The ECOSOC status of many Misesan Cara members and network groups allows them to facilitate their participation in global development and human rights processes events of representatives from grassroots organisations in the Global South.

This representation, in turn, enables voices from the margins to be heard at the heart of the global human rights architecture and within sustainable development mechanisms, including on issues relating to education, and to monitor progress on issues raised.

In July 2020, Edmund Rice International (ERI) joined Indian partners Nine Is Mine and PRATYeK to engage with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education at the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council. They commended India's near-universal enrolment in primary schooling and its Right to Education Act. They expressed concern about retention levels, however; and they urged the Indian government to ensure that both primary and secondary education are more inclusive for children with learning disabilities through changes in policy and practice.

Faith providers of education also contribute to the right to education by supporting pluralism, the Global Catholic Education report 2021 notes, in line with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states: "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to

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<sup>4</sup> Misesan Cara receives Irish development cooperation financing, a major source of its funding, through Irish Aid. Under OECD/DAC [guidance on Official Development Assistance](#), grants for development and welfare expenditures of religious bodies may be included, provided

their children". Misesan Cara members also note that a diversity of providers can enhance innovation and improvement in education systems.

## Leveraging resources

In 2019, Misesan Cara members (non-state, faith-based education providers) brought additional co-funding of €7.9m to complement Irish Aid funding of €5.2m for 102 education projects. In 2020, members leveraged €6.5m co-funding from Irish Aid funding of €4.8m for 105 projects, so the cumulative contributions to expanding access to quality education in low- and middle-income countries are significant.

In some cases, Misesan Cara members secure some ministry funding from countries in the Global South for their education initiatives, often after concerted advocacy for support of a marginalised community or vulnerable population cohort – which is generally towards teacher salaries. In some countries, they have become (to a greater or lesser extent) valued actors within a heterogenous public education system rather than, or *in addition to*, being non-state providers.

Most of the co-funding that members secure, however, is raised from a combination of private sources (the FBO itself, partner communities, religious organisations, networks and dioceses; individuals – often overseas) and bilateral donor or institutional funding in the Global North.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, much of this funding would not be available to these or any education interventions in that country and location without the presence, initiative, experience, networks, and international reach of the FBOs concerned. In addition, FBOs leverage considerable expertise and learning, built up globally over many decades, to bring to community and national contexts in a spirit of collaboration.

Faith groups in education advocate themselves as organisations – locally, nationally, and internationally – as well as in alliance with local NGOs, INGOs and civil society/religious networks for governments (both in the Global South and in donor states) to scale up spending to deliver quality, equity, and access in education.

such expenditures do not have a religious motive but are used for development assistance and relief. In education, people of all faiths and none are free to access Misesan Cara members' facilities and services.

It is estimated that this will require at least 20% of total public expenditure, or the allocation of 4-6% of GDP, to education in low- and middle-income countries<sup>5</sup> – with a focus on basic education, which is understood as primary, lower secondary, and non-formal education intended to meet the basic learning needs of people of all ages.

For example, Misesan Cara members have joined with Irish development NGOs in promoting a strong focus of donor countries in allocating ODA to quality education for all (and especially girls) that is particularly focused on poor countries and communities; and in questioning the allocation of ODA and public funds to *commercial, for-profit private schools or market-oriented Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) aimed at making commercial returns.*

## Free education

Focused on upholding the right to education, Misesan Cara members recognise the right to free education as underlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They also note, however, that in many of the countries where they work, governments – the primary duty bearers to vindicate this right – cannot, or sometimes will not, provide this free education for all.

They also have the experience that FBOs themselves, in some contexts, need to charge fees for reasons of service survival, effective implementation, school sustainability, cross-subsidisation by students more able to pay of those less able (or unable) to pay – whether that cross-subsidisation occurs within an educational institution or across different institutions in a location, country or region.

For those reasons, and the very sizeable implementation gap to achieve SDG4, Misesan Cara suggests that there needs to be a *progressive realisation* of the right to free basic education within the maximum available resources (which may suggest a preliminary focus on minimum core obligations on basic education, equitable access, non-discrimination, accountability, and necessary monitoring of progress towards the realisation of the right to education for all) ahead of full vindication of that right.

FBO education providers supported by Misesan Cara operate as pro-poor education service providers

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<sup>5</sup>[https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-02-gpe-domestic-policy-brief\\_web.pdf](https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-02-gpe-domestic-policy-brief_web.pdf)

(across the spectrum from early childhood education to higher secondary education), even if some charge fees in specific, narrow contexts – since fees are only used for the sustainability of education services/institutions, and often with an element of the cross-subsidisation by those students who can afford fees of those who cannot, rather than to realise profits.

This recognition by FBOs in education of the pragmatic requirement to sometimes charge (affordable) fees to those students who can pay is not at all the same thing as promoting for-profit or commercially driven education. This distinction is important to bear in mind in the dialogue around non-state actors in education provision, which will only ramp up with the *GEM Report 2021*.

In contrast to some of the for-profit providers among non-state actors being considered in *GEM Report 2021*, Misesan Cara-supported FBOs are keenly aware of and responsive to equity concerns (at the same time as addressing educational quality and sustainability demands); and they are actively concerned with minimising any negative affordability and equity implications if there are fees charged.

In many cases, members' projects have income-generating activities built around a holistic school programme to enhance sustainability and avoid or minimise any fees, while waiving any fees that may be charged for those who cannot afford them.

Misesan Cara's members support the Right to Education (through the provision of basic services combined with holding duty bearers to account and/or supporting their capacity to provide) where the state is not able or willing to vindicate that right, or to do so for a particular marginalised community or population cohort at a particular place and time.

## Government and Stakeholder Engagement

Misesan Cara member FBOs in education are specifically tasked with addressing consistency with Government policy in their initiatives, as well as indicating stakeholder engagement – including with pupils/education participants, central and local government, ministry officials, parents, communities, and other actors in education. They report to Misesan

Cara on how they contribute to system strengthening in the local or national contexts; and it aggregates data and reports annually on the collective member contribution.

Misean Cara specifically encourages members involved in education provision to engage with Government actors, policies, and regulation, as well as collaborating and influencing other stakeholders, where possible, towards achievement of equitable and good quality education for all. Many members are actively involved in efforts to enhance teaching and learning outcomes, school leadership practice, access for girls, inclusive education, special needs education, human rights and environmental education, civic awareness, etc.

In 2019, Misean Cara members drew on many years of experience to contribute to Ministry of Education annual work plans or national education policy formulation in 78 cases, at either meso or macro level. There were also 90 cases where projects participated in district-level education forums. Project initiatives were involved in education-related advocacy at local or district level (211 instances) and national level (10 cases). There were four instances of projects participating in national level research.

## Leaving No One Behind

Misean Cara's approach to education supports members' initiatives specifically favouring the provision of education services in rural, geographically isolated and informal urban (slum) locations, challenging conflict and post-conflict situations, and services reaching specific target cohorts (girls, refugees, IDPs, persons with a disability, other particularly excluded groups) in support of the SDGs' 'Leave No One Behind' principle.

In South Africa, for example, Misean Cara supports the Three2Six Project as a member's partner, and this has been recognised as a champion of inclusive education within the *GEM Report 2020*. Operating since 2008 through the Marist Brothers, the project offers access to education for forcibly displaced children of 5 to 14 years old (with varied legal statuses) who cannot otherwise hope to access state schooling in South Africa. Three2Six operates from three schools in Johannesburg and has enabled more than 500 children to register at state schools since it started.

Three2Six's primary school-level education services are free and, though participants may be asked to make a small contribution, if they can, to transport costs, such a contribution is by no means compulsory and its amount depends entirely on parents' or guardians' abilities to contribute.

Keeping girls in school is one of the key priorities for Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), a project partner of Misean Cara's through Irish Jesuits International, in supporting forcibly displaced people – whose number has increased, and situation worsened, during a COVID-19 pandemic that has worsened existing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

JRS has recently completed a Gender Analysis identifying barriers to secondary school access and completion in the refugee-hosting district of Adjumani in Northern Uganda, to enhance its gender-responsive secondary education. It confirmed supply-side barriers to girls' access to and completion of schooling, including a limited number of secondary schools, distance to school, unsafe school environments, and inadequate sanitary supplies/facilities.

The research also noted important demand-side barriers, including attitudes to girls' schooling, child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), early and unplanned pregnancy, household poverty and school costs as particular threats to girls' access to and completion of schooling.

This analysis gave rise to JRS developing a Gender-Responsive Education (GRE) Framework, which tackles different barriers (with different levels of severity and consequence) in an integrated way, which draws on best practices and allows tailoring for the local context. This framework, which can align well with wider gender responsive programming across sectors, offers important thinking for international organisations, NGOs and FBOs who are seeking to develop educational response plans for refugee and refugee-hosting communities.

Misean Cara members also make keen efforts to address the right to education of persons with a disability, whether through targeted provision of specialist services that address specific needs for individuals or groups, or through efforts to ensure and expand inclusion within existing education services. Scholars have been looking for years at faith-based education providers as players that are mainly able to improve *quality of education*, with a focus on learning

achievement. However, a particular focus (and advantage) of many faith-based, non-profit providers – such as those who are Misesan Cara members – is to deliberately impact marginalised and disadvantaged population cohorts, and neglected, isolated, remote, or conflict-affected areas.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit in Paraguay are working with the indigenous Ava Guarani population. Thanks to their lobbying effort with the national government as part of a wider network, a Law for Indigenous Education was passed in 2007, allowing the Ava Guarani to receive education in their native language.

With funding from Misesan Cara, the project team now works with the local communities to design their own curriculum and didactic material, to ensure it is relevant to their culture.

In some cases, distrust has emerged between ‘furthest behind’ groups, state authorities and/or education providers, which FBOs can and do bridge – building on trust relations established through long presence and the holistic support of diverse community needs. In such instances, communities may be more inclined to send their children to a non-state provider of education that they trust; and the non-state actor can act as a type of intermediary between the community and local or national authorities.

In Northern Sri Lanka, the Salesians Sisters and De La Salle Brothers support education in Tamil areas for a population group long affected by war. The Marist Fathers work with Burmese migrants in Thailand who cannot access state education due to language and legal barriers, and who live in fear that they may they be deported.

Research for Misesan Cara on the Missionary Approach to Development Initiatives identified that it has real strengths and potential in relation to the SDGs’ imperative of Reaching the Furthest Behind First, a concept that aligns closely with the ‘preferential option for the poor’ that informs many members’ approaches.

In fact, each of the five components of the [MADI framework](#) (long-term local presence; holistic approach; prophetic vision; personal witness; and crossing boundaries) helps to inform how Misesan Cara

members prioritise the furthest behind in very specific ways in a six-stage process involving assessment, analysis, accompaniment, addressing specific cohorts’ circumstances, advocating, and adapting interventions to changing targeting requirements.

## Education Quality

The Brookings Institution notes how learning achievement in Sub-Saharan Africa has remained low even as access to education has improved. Seeing this reality persist in many low-HDI, conflict affected and ‘fragile’ countries around the world, FBO education providers are keenly focused on quality of infrastructure, outcomes and system strengthening as well as equitable access – in coordination and collaboration with government and other partners.

Drawing from the learning of various effectiveness reviews of Misesan Cara-funded education delivery by its members (FBOs that are non-state, not-for-profit education providers), consultants found in 11 education projects across five countries:

- That all the projects were highly relevant to the contexts and beneficiaries’ needs
- Addressed wider issues of poverty and discrimination in a ‘holistic approach’
- Had high enrolment and attendance rates, reflecting both high need and their own good reputation; and
- Were mostly well-linked to other stakeholders, service providers and other actors, which often helped leverage additional resources or complementary services.

The Effectiveness Review highlighted as particular contributions to effectiveness of the faith-based approach: the providers’ long-term presence, contextual understanding, and cultural sensitivity; emphasis on quality education – even in difficult contexts; their holistic approach – focusing on family and community, and on food, health, and psycho-social requirements, as well as participants’ particular educational needs. It also noted the FBO education providers’ innovating and advocating as the educational and life situations of the target communities demanded.



The Effectiveness Review identified some simple and practical approaches that could be replicated by actors involved in delivering quality education to refugee, migrant and displaced communities in other settings. Examples include effective approaches to integrating pupils, the creation and use of highly mobile and adaptable “school-in-a-trunk” resources, teaching in local languages, addressing trauma through psychosocial and complementary therapies, and expediting project participants’ acquisition of essential documentation.

Misean Cara’s Learning Brief on [Inclusive and Quality Education for All](#) notes several practical examples of member effectiveness in education:

In one project in Zimbabwe, run by the Redemptorist Fathers, expertise developed on Accelerated Literacy & Numeracy Education has been shared with other organisations in Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Kenya. Reviewers’ observations from the project show that most children gain confidence and are prepared to enter mainstream education after one year. The project’s methodology has directly influenced a new UNICEF programme, which was implemented nationally.

In Zambia, a project run by the Sisters of the Sacred heart of Jesus and Mary for children with special educational needs has become a centre of excellence, recognised by the government and other educational institutions. It is the only school in Zambia providing education to Deaf and Blind children.

## Holistic education

Misean Cara’s faith-based (non-state and non-profit) providers of education place a high emphasis on holistic education rooted in the inherent human dignity of each person. As a matter of educational practice, they inculcate values and behaviours through education within or outside school systems, such as equity, inclusion (regardless of gender, ethnicity, caste, wealth, dis/ability), respect for the self and others, honesty, punctuality, teamwork, and interpersonal skills.

They frequently promote gender transformational approaches through fostering critique of roles and inequalities, strengthening positive norms, and

promoting gains in the relative positions in society of women, girls, and marginalized groups. This means, for instance, that different Misean Cara members in different places support teacher training, school systems, infrastructural improvements, curriculum/textbook development, leadership, and personal development initiatives that challenge stereotypes and discriminatory practices (such as child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, and girls’ early withdrawal from school for home or paid labour).

Many members’ projects also support attempts to build better safeguarding policies and mechanisms, to move towards elimination of all forms of schools-related gender-based violence, and to advance education that helps transform participants (in both formal and non-formal settings), their choices and life situations – whether in school, family, or community.

The holistic aspect of the Missionary Approach to Development practised by Misean Cara members often means that a project intervention will involve different dimensions: within a schools-based initiative, there might also be an outreach project working with parents on self-esteem, literacy, or livelihoods.

Rooted in decades of educational work in Pakistan and operating schools in the provinces of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh (especially in poorer areas and for minority groups), the Presentation Sisters: offer reduced fees or scholarships for poorer children (given that all the schools are fee-paying since none is supported by the state); undertake continuous teacher training to promote child-centred learning and to try to move education practice beyond rote methods; and they model family and community engagement to improve both attendance and school accountability, including through parent meetings, orientation and education for parents.

The Presentation Sisters also provide free and supervised homework clubs, demonstrated to improve retention and learning among poorer students; do regular evaluations of teaching and learning to drive improvements; provide inclusive and pluralist education, tackling discriminatory attitudes and practices on the basis of faith, gender or ethnic group; and offer internationally-supported advanced training for teachers and principals with leadership potential to enhance school management and contribute to system strengthening.

Given the holistic approach of many of their educational interventions, members are enormously aware of the scale and severity of the disruption that COVID-19 has brought about. They are already active on addressing massive challenges that COVID-19 disruption has brought to the lives of young people, particularly girls - not just in terms of educational retention and achievement but also their safety and security, in the face of threats of child labour, abuse, early pregnancy and early marriage, FGM, and human trafficking, as well as damage to household incomes.

Educational responses to COVID-19 and in its aftermath will need to integrate measures to address protection, hunger, psycho-social health, and household economic problems as well as specific 'return to learning' challenges, particularly for especially vulnerable cohorts, such as girls, refugees, migrants, and people with disabilities.

Integrated approaches practised by many Misesan Cara members in education – incorporating such elements as well-being and life skills, family livelihood and food interventions, community-based supports, and advocating for especially vulnerable cohorts – give them a useful lead on the type of holistic education that will be essential to 'building forward better' after the pandemic.

## Innovation

Misesan Cara established an Innovation Fund in 2019 to learn from, and to test the potential to replicate or scale-up, interesting initiatives by its members, who are dedicated to finding solutions for challenges in education, with transformative effect. These include efforts to improve the retention in school of girls, engage family support, empower girls, eradicate corporal punishment, enhance sanitary infrastructure for girls within schools, tackle SGBV, broaden community support for girls in education, and broaden 'open school' systems using existing infrastructure.

In another example of innovation, Misesan Cara has been supporting a project of the Catholic Institute of Education for some years, working through multiple members at different times (the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the Salesians of Don Bosco, Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux) to contribute to Building Peaceful Catholic Schools in South Africa. This is an initiative to tackle commonplace and widespread violence, xenophobia and racism through whole-school restorative justice, peace-building and safeguarding

approaches, in ways that are informing and modelling change for the nation's entire school system.

CIE engages actively with the Teacher Development and Curriculum Management Committee (TDCMC) and has now become a permanent part of the National School Safety Steering Committee (NSSC) as part of a partnership approach between Government and civil society. For learners, the peer mediation training is creating a means and 'voice' to participate actively in restorative approaches.

## 6. Conclusions

Faith-based organisations have provided a high-quality relevant education to millions of children around the world for decades. The holistic, empowering education they provide addresses the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of those people and communities they reach throughout life's stages. They particularly seek to encourage a love of learning, a critical questioning mind, civic values, and a culture of social service.

An external evaluation in 2019 noted that this Building Peaceful Schools initiative by South Africa's Catholic Institute of Education – which has been implemented in 61 schools (59 ongoing) across 6 regions, and through which 209 learners have been trained as peer mediators across nine schools – is contributing to, and starting to be embedded in, safer, fairer school communities.

They use their knowledge, long-term presence and commitment, expertise, and evidence to **strengthen education systems and influence the education agenda – for equitable access to quality education or all – through modelling and evolving good practice**, actively engaging on policy, processes, and methods, and sometimes through advocacy and campaigning.

Misesan Cara members act as non-state, non-profit providers of education in ways anticipated in the Education 2030 Framework for Action: they bring vast knowledge, experience, and network expertise; tackle equity, inclusion, and quality issues as well as educational access; and leverage organisational, ODA, institutional and private resources from outside particular project countries that would generally not otherwise be invested there.

They are also involved with innovating and system strengthening; engaging constructively with other

stakeholders (including ministry official at local and national levels); and reporting transparently. They do all this **within a framework of country ownership, government policy, standard-setting, and regulation** to advance inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

These Misedan Cara FBOs in education are non-state, not-for-profit providers that are not just **accountable** to local communities and stakeholders through school/project governance and accountability mechanisms, but also to district/national education ministries within the national education framework, and operate within national legislation, education frameworks and regulation/inspection regimes. They are additionally accountable within their own organisation structures, to Misedan Cara and – through that – to Irish Aid and its public accountability mechanisms, so there is no gap in transparency and accountability, as may be the concern with some types of non-state, for-profit providers.

Non-state providers take many forms, ranging from large-scale for-profit firms to individual entrepreneurs, NGOs or faith-based organisations, non-profit community groups, and sometimes non-state armed groups exercising territorial control. Misedan Cara's faith-based and non-profit education providers fully **support the right to education for all, and engagement with Government to demand and support fulfilment of that right** – and they share many of the concerns being expressed about for-profit education, privatisation, and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) being promoted in the Global South and developed countries alike, together with the allocation of ODA towards those ends.

## 7. Recommendations

Misedan Cara stresses, in the context of the GEM Report 2021, that not all non-state actors are alike; and that poverty-focused, accessible, equitable and regulated quality education by FBOs has a vital role to play in education in many poor countries and communities, and where the state cannot or has not provided for marginalised cohorts.

Misedan Cara recommends that the GEM Report 2021 reflections on non-state providers in education take due account of:

1. **Heterogeneity:** The report and stakeholder dialogue should note the need for a nuanced discussion of the quite diverse values, roles, approaches and merits of non-state actors in education, who are far from homogenous. For example, faith-based not-for-profits services operating within state frameworks, policies and regulatory systems may often have more in common with public education (in terms of values, purpose and practice) than they do with other types of non-state education providers, be they commercial, unregulated, or poorly regulated.
2. **Complexity:** The report and dialogue should take into account multiple typologies (based on features such as registration, regulation and policy alignment, effectiveness, equity and accountability, *in addition to* factors like quality, inclusion, cost, efficiency, innovation, influence and holistic education: addressing empowerment, personal and civic values, social transformation) when discussing and making recommendations around funding, policy and practice – rather than using simple but sometimes unhelpful delineations such as state/non-state or for-profit/charitable.
3. **Differentiation:** The editorial team should develop a section in GEM Report 2021, or a work theme for its follow-up, that reflects and expands on the considerable differentiation within non-state actors (in terms of the thematic areas: provision; financing; governance; influence and innovation; and others besides) – and which particularly reflects on regulated, sustainable, and affordable provision for vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. That might reflect on how policy discussions and recommendations affect non-profit FBOs (but not simply 'charitable') educational providers differently to other non-state providers – such as, *inter alia*, considering how frameworks and guidance such as SABER EPS11<sup>6</sup> may affect FBOs differently (in positive or negative ways) than private for-profit providers of education, such as international, commercial school chains.
4. **Context:** The GEM Report 2021, its recommendations and related policy dialogue must

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<sup>6</sup> [SABER Systems Approach for Better Education Results - Home \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org)

take account of the realities on the ground in many low- and middle-income, conflict-affected, debt-burdened and otherwise stressed countries, and the gulf between current realities and ambitious intentions for the achievement of SDG4. These realities, particularly after COVID19, will require the broad and continued involvement of diverse non-state actors for some time – even if the partnership basis, matters of funding/subsidisation, ownership, governance and regulation, and accountability mechanisms (teaching and learning, financial and social) may well require debate, refinement, and multi-stakeholder agreement.

5. **Voice:** Dialogue around and follow-up to the GEM Report 2021 should include the perspectives and voices of people from marginalised groups/ locations (however ‘furthest behind first’ groups

may be identified) within discussions on non-state actors in education. This could involve getting their take on the GEM Report interest areas of provision, financing, governance, influence, and innovation.

UNESCO and other stakeholders, such as funders, might also take such marginalised people’s and groups’ views into account in relation to: supported access for poor, marginalised, and conflict-affected groups; values education and personal development; civic and environmental awareness; holistic and gender-transformative approaches. These are all promoted within Miseen Cara members’ faith-based education and often much appreciated by those ‘furthest behind’, or at risk of being left behind, in society – in denial of the Right to Education.

### About Miseen Cara

Established in 2004, Miseen Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development network of 88 member organisations working in over 50 countries. We work with some of the world’s most marginalised and vulnerable people, mostly in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South – including women, children, persons with a disability, refugees, and internally displaced people as strategic target groups, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals’ principle to Leave No One Behind.

Miseen Cara members work individually and collectively through [the missionary approach to development initiatives](#), rooted in respect, justice, commitment, compassion, and integrity. Through the missionary approach, combined integrally with good development and humanitarian practice, Miseen Cara strives to mobilise and enable communities to shape their lives and choices, challenge injustice, and vindicate human rights for all.

Miseen Cara members support communities to promote, protect and fulfil rights to quality education; to health, clean water, and sanitation; and to sustainable livelihoods; as well as advocating for economic, social, cultural, civil, political, and development rights more generally – supporting excluded and marginalised people to find their power, engage in processes and influence laws, policies and practices that affect their lives, and effect changes to realise their 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.

#### Miseen Cara Policy Briefs

This is one of a series of Miseen Cara policy papers contributing to discourse on development cooperation and human rights. Our Strategy calls on us to leverage members’ experience and strengths, give voice to vulnerable and marginalised communities’ priorities, uphold and promote human rights, and progress sustainable human development. Through our policy papers, we will draw together members’ experiences in challenging poverty, inequality, injustice, and the denial of rights; share learning and innovations; and propose ideas to influence norms, policies, and practice in favour of the marginalised individuals and communities that members accompany and serve.

Miseen Cara Policy Briefs will be available at [www.miseancara.ie/public-resources](http://www.miseancara.ie/public-resources).

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