

# The durability of the Irish missionary model



Misean Cara's CEO tells Ruadhán Jones about the unique role missionaries play in the developing world

In Ireland, people outside the Church sometimes think that it's a spent force. However, you don't have to look too far to see this isn't the case. The model of service and charity offered by the Irish missionaries is one that John Moffett, CEO of Misean Cara, believes is still "unique and special", giving "personal witness" to their Faith and their dedication.

Misean Cara, which means 'friends of missions', is a faith-based organisation that supports 88 Irish missionary organisations, channelling funds from the Government's Irish Aid programme and private donors to missionaries in more than 50 countries worldwide.

**“There's also the element of the personal witness, to be there and live with people in a way that is adapting to the culture and society they operate in”**

“We have a way of encapsulating the way we see missionaries carrying out development work in a way that's unique and special,” Mr Moffett begins. “There's a number of points or elements to that. One is that our members, the missionaries from Ireland, will stay long-term in the countries where they operate. They really get to know the people and the community they're working with.”

Another great strength of missionary organisations is that “they're able to mobilise resources due to their ability to cross boundaries”, he continues. “After moving from Ireland, to spend their entire life and career in maybe somewhere in Africa, say Zambia or Malawi, they're able to work collectively with their congregations back in Ireland and across other parts of the globe, to bring the best experience and the best resources available to help develop the schools they're working with. That's really important to them.

“There's also the element of the personal witness, to be there and live with people in a way that is adapting to the culture and society they operate



Sr Rosemary Oduol (centre) of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa with a group of children in the diocese of Wau, South Sudan.

in. They show their Faith and demonstrate their experience through living with the communities and the people they're working with on a day-to-day basis.”

All of this helps Irish missionaries to “build trust, to build community, to build respect”, Mr Moffett asserts. Highlighting one of the major challenges developing nations are facing after the pandemic – restoring disrupted education – he says that “it's important that they have that respect built within communities”.

## Conversations

Because of this, they are “able to encourage parents to be able to send their children [to school], being able to have those conversations, difficult conversations particularly around encouraging parents to send girl children to school, especially if money is tight in the family or the family just don't see the value of sending girls to school”.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to hang like a black cloud over the missionaries and their communities, as vaccination rates are much slower in the developing world, Mr Moffett says.

“I think our missionaries have pretty much just been continuing to plug away while Covid is ongoing,” Mr Moffett points out. “They've remained in the countries where they're working, they've continued to provide services or adapt their projects as well as possible.”

As the pandemic slowly winds down, the missionaries' focus can return to other areas in need of development. One of these, which Misean Cara's members are working actively on, is youth employment. With a rapidly increasing youth population in the developing world, the need to find them jobs is constantly increasing.

“Many of our members are actively working with young people,” Mr Moffett explains. “Especially in Africa we have a rapidly growing youth popula-

tion, which are suffering from the dual challenges of not having sufficient skills and training to find jobs. And then on the second hand, there's been a severe lack of employment opportunities available for them.

“We have members who are working to address both of those challenges, both by providing training skills for young people to enable them to access and find a decent job that will pay a living wage. And then working outside the training colleges to find them opportunities to apprentice and get that first rung in the ladder of professional development to get a job basically, to get started.

**“An example of the work carried out by a Misean Cara member is work done by the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa in South Sudan”**

“It's really important to be able to do that, there is a unique role for our missionaries again because of this missionary approach to development that they enshrine in their work, to navigate those pathways from training through to employment and help young people to find their way into decent jobs.”

An example of the work carried out by a Misean Cara member is work done by the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa in South Sudan. Sr Rosemary Oduol, a member of the FMSA's leadership team in Dublin, assists the congregation's missionary development officers and tells me about the projects funded by Misean Cara that they manage.

“Each country's needs are more or less the same, but they have their unique aspects,” Sr Rosemary begins. “South Sudan has been through a lot of war for a long time, and then also



Sr Rosemary FMSA (centre left) in South Sudan with a team from a hospital in the region.

Covid came. People are not settled, they have been displaced so many times, the girl child is always the most disadvantaged.

“But the boy-child also, they always went to the war as early as 13 or even younger. Again, they need a lot of education support, plus rehabilitating. Because, having gone through prolonged periods of war and conflict is a very traumatising experience, both for the boy-child and the girl-child.”

## Education

In supporting education, Sr Rosemary stresses, it's not just about buildings and student numbers – “education is key to everything”.

“If we want to even begin to influence some change within the society, education is very, very important,” she continues. “When we talk of supporting education it's really sensitising the community to embrace education, to allow their children to go to school, dialoguing with the community to allow girls go to school.

“You have to consider the situation, the worldview of the people you are dealing with. With the displacement and the conflicts and now Covid, it's very easy for any commu-

nity to think, life is short. To make use of it is to marry your daughter out immediately she's 13, 14, 15. You'll get some cows, which are paid for bride-price, and life continues.

**“You work with the lawmakers, the chiefs, both traditional leaders and the government leaderships”**

“To persuade and even to prove to the parents, you need to give girls a better future through education, is a very taxing reality. It involves a lot of strategies, you work with the girl, you do the counselling, you convince them – again you work with the parents, you convince them. You work with the lawmakers, the chiefs, both traditional leaders and the government leaderships.


“In all these things, you are going against the current, trying to sell an idea that is not fully understood. That would be the work of our sisters in South Sudan and the mission we are supporting then,” Sr Rosemary finishes.





**Irish Missionaries:**

**Bearing Witness, Speaking Out  
and Transforming Lives.**



**Since 2004, Misean Cara has supported the work of  
Irish Missionaries around the world.**



**Irish Aid**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Misean Cara gratefully acknowledges  
the funding support of Irish Aid

Learn more about our work and give  
your support by visiting our website:

[www.miseancara.ie](http://www.miseancara.ie)