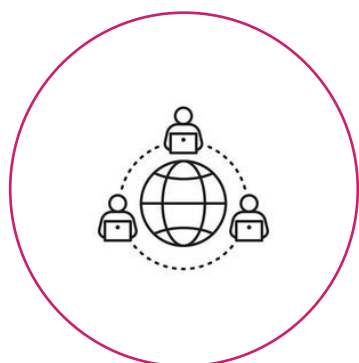
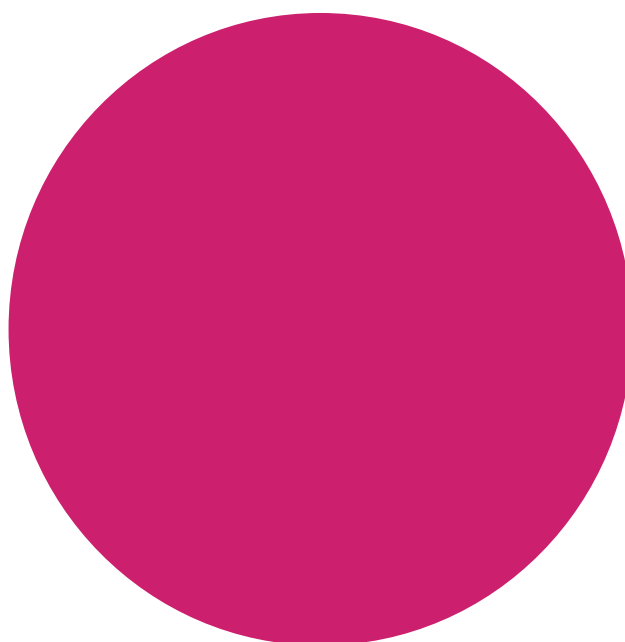


Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2022/03

Distance Monitoring

Opportunities arising from the global pandemic



misean cara
Mission Support from Ireland

October 2022

1. Introduction

Misean Cara is a membership organisation that works through its 88 member organisations, supporting over 350 projects in more than 50 countries of the Global South each year. In addition to providing funding support, Misean Cara adopts an accompaniment approach, offering technical assistance and continuous learning opportunities to its members. Project monitoring visits are an integral part of this model.

Due to the global travel restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Misean Cara developed a Distance Monitoring approach in early 2020 to fulfil its commitment to provide support and learning to members. While recognising that distance monitoring cannot fully replace the level of engagement in physical monitoring visits, a process was developed that allowed for a meaningful level of oversight without travel.

This innovative approach not only enabled Misean Cara to monitor 92 projects worth €16.5m in 2020 and 2021, but also provides an opportunity for continuous support to projects where external circumstances make a field visit impossible or unadvisable, for example, for cost-effectiveness considerations in very isolated projects or during conflicts, political unrest, or natural disasters.

Thanks to their flexible design, the tools and processes can be adapted to other remote engagements, including safeguarding assessments and distance audits.

2. Developing the tools

In consultation with Misean Cara staff, development mentors, and member organisations, the distance monitoring process and a supporting suite of tools were developed from April 2020.

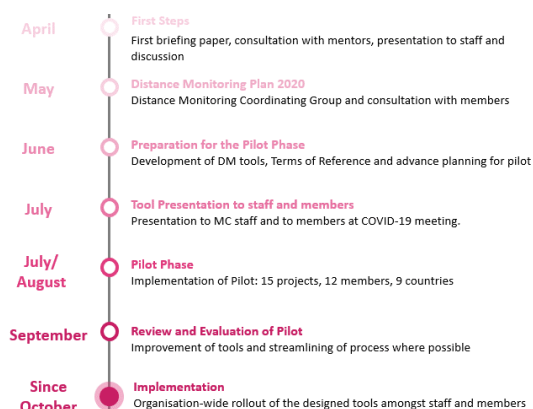


Image 1: Process development (April to October 2020)

3. The Process

The resulting Distance Monitoring process consists of six different stages:

- 1. Preparation Phase:** The Terms of Reference and key documents (see below) are shared with the member organisation and the project team to allow them to prepare for the engagement, and dates for virtual interviews are arranged.
- 2. Desk Review:** The monitoring person reviews project information such as proposals, reports, needs assessments and previous monitoring or evaluation reports.
- 3. Project self-assessment:** The project teams complete a self-assessment form, which is pre-populated with project information held in Misean Cara's data management system and serves as an internal evaluation tool for the project teams. The information collected in this document relates to results to date, challenges and successes, monitoring and evaluation structures, governance, safeguarding, and project finances.
- 4. Stakeholder voices:** Engaging with project participants and allowing them to describe their experiences with, and views of, the project are important aspects of monitoring visits. To capture these voices during distance monitoring, conversations with stakeholders are arranged in form of phone/video call interviews or focus group discussions. Where this is not possible, the project teams are asked to record short videos with statements from participants.
- 5. Key informant interviews:** Semi-structured interviews are held with those involved in overseeing, implementing and/or supporting the project. Key informants always include the project manager, safeguarding focal point and project finance officer, but may also include other project staff, local civil and religious leaders, government representatives and/or NGO partners depending on the project.
- 6. Analysis, report and follow-up:** Upon completion of the interviews, the monitoring person facilitates a short de-briefing with the member and project team to give initial feedback, highlighting the strengths of the project and raising issues of concern. An internal report is prepared based on the

information gathered, and a feedback letter containing observations and recommendations is shared with the member organisation and project team. If serious issues are found, structured follow-up is provided until the issues are resolved satisfactorily.

4. The Tools

To ensure all staff, members and project teams understand the new process and are comfortable with it, a suite of tools was developed.



Image 2: Complete set of distance monitoring tools; three for project teams and six for Misean Cara staff to facilitate in-depth data collection, triangulation and reporting

Guidance Document

This document provides a complete step-by-step guide to the overall Distance Monitoring process. It is straightforward and easy to read and includes an executive summary that can easily be translated into local languages, if required by project teams.

This document serves as a key resource for teams whose projects are being monitored, for those supporting and mentoring them, as well as for Misean Cara staff conducting the monitoring.

Self-Assessment Tool

The project self-assessment tool allows project teams to reflect on their progress to date on areas such as governance, safeguarding, results, and finance. The information provided in the self-assessment tool allows the monitoring person to fine-tune interview questions, as some issues might already become evident. All information provided through this document is verified through triangulation, using additional sources including semi-structured key informant interviews and a thorough desk review.

Interview Guides and Templates

As online engagements were not the norm until the onset of the pandemic, several online interview guides and templates were developed. These

provide useful guidance for the monitoring person on what to consider during online interviews with project teams and participants. The guides also identify common challenges and provide suggestions on how to navigate these.

The interview templates suggest a structure for interviews and allow the monitoring person to keep track of all important questions, while providing enough flexibility to account for the semi-structured nature of the interviews. Interviewers can use the templates for notetaking throughout the interview, which facilitates data analysis later on.

Interview templates for project participants also include a section on informed consent to ensure interviewees understand their rights and how their information will be used.

Reporting and Feedback Templates

Finally, already existing templates for internal monitoring reports and feedback letters to project teams were adapted to accommodate both physical monitoring visits and distance monitoring engagements. Both documents ensure that all important areas are covered and that feedback to project teams is constructive and useful.

Like in traditional monitoring, an internal report is completed by the monitoring person, covering governance and compliance, safeguarding, results, and financial information.

A feedback letter containing observations and recommendations is shared with the member organisation and project team. Project teams are expected to provide a written response to all recommendations within four weeks.

Additionally, feedback letters may include areas of concern which need to be addressed immediately and require structured follow-up by the member organisation and Misean Cara.

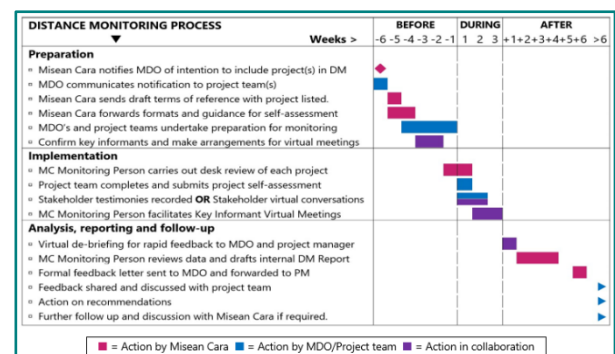


Image 3: Distance Monitoring process overview

5. Feedback and learning

The introduction of a distance monitoring process was crucial throughout the pandemic to continue providing support and accompaniment to project teams worldwide.

It is acknowledged that distance monitoring cannot replace field visits, as in-person encounters provide a more holistic understanding of the local context, challenges and successes, and give room for spontaneous conversations outside of scheduled interviews. Yet, feedback from project teams suggests that it is possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the project and its challenges through remote engagements.

The sweat, the anxieties, the fears, the political situation, the social dilemma, the intricacy of living among a displaced war affected people with very little security – You have read it all beautifully from that distance. [...] I am happy that you have been able to grasp the depth of this project as if you were really present here.

Project manager, Sri Lanka

After a successful piloting of this process in 2020 and its wide implementation in 2021, Misean Cara moved to a hybrid approach to monitoring in 2022, visiting some projects, while engaging remotely

with those projects that cannot be visited due to travel restrictions or safety concerns.

Based on the success of the pilot process, distance safeguarding monitoring and distance audit workflows were also developed. Distance monitoring is now an integral part of Misean Cara's annual project engagement plan.



Image 4: The Servants of the Holy Spirit provide holistic support to the indigenous Ava Guaraní in Paraguay. Due to its remote location and the low number of other projects in Paraguay, the costs for regular visits to the project site by Misean Cara staff cannot be justified. Distance monitoring provides an opportunity to support the project remotely. This photo shows a focus group discussion with project participants, with one participant (front left) having a conversation with the Misean Cara monitoring person through a video call on the laptop.

Photo credit: Servants of the Holy Spirit

About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development organisation made up of 88 member organisations working with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in over 50 countries in the Global South. 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 allows for rapid, efficient and targeted responses.

In our Strategy 2022 – 2026, our vision is of a world where people who are excluded from society are empowered through our members upholding the rights to:

- climate resilient livelihoods and decent work
- quality education
- better health, clean water and sanitation
- human rights

Emergency relief and support.

Misean Cara gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Irish Aid.



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