



RELIGIOSE DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA
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Nature of Views: Congregational Response
Organization: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
Role: General Council
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Introduction:

We are answering as the General leadership of an international apostolic religious congregation of 787 members in 5 provinces and 2 regions. We have received strong support from Misesan Cara for development projects in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Brazil.

Progress Made:

It seems to us that the Irish Government has made significant progress in implementing the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid. Our relationship to Irish Aid is through Misesan Cara. We are a NGO at the United Nations in New York and we also have an Institute Co-ordinator for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation with a liaison in each province/region. These groups are working as a network with poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as a focus. All of our work is collaborative and we try to link work for advocacy with direct service projects in mission countries. This is an ongoing challenge, but it is also a priority for us.

Aid from Misesan Cara helps us by emphasizing values we also hold, e.g. transparency, working as much as possible in partnerships and collaboration with other groups, empowerment of local people, evaluation for evidence and effectiveness, and planning for long-term sustainability. The latter includes an understanding of the necessity of forming local leaders who can continue this work in the future.

The changes in Misesan Cara in these last years have both challenged and supported us in our efforts. The emphasis on strategic planning with clear goals and evidence against which to evaluate achievements is helpful. In addition, strict accountability for the use of funds supports our efforts at General Level with regard to projects at the local level.

Our mission work is focused in Brazil and in sub-Saharan Africa and we can attest to the multiple inter-locking issues that reinforce a vicious cycle of poverty. We experience with our own sisters the difficulties in obtaining and offering good education, the effects of poor medical care, and early death rates. In Africa we see evidence of a growing economy, but many, many people have no way to participate in it. Issues of corruption by political leaders abound and we hear stories of aid money being siphoned off for personal purposes. For this reason, accountability is not only necessary to ensure good use of the money; it is also formative for the local people working in the projects. For us, the exigencies imposed by Misesan Cara are gratefully received.

Our most recent work in Mozambique and Zimbabwe focuses on developing small projects that address the immediate needs of poor people, e.g. a joint project with the Catholic Diocese of Mutare (Zimbabwe) to improve the nutritional, health and socio-economic status of HIV affected households in two communities; a library development program in Danganvura, a former black township in Mutare, a food and life-skills program for orphaned children in Harare, Zimbabwe and another in Lusaka, Zambia. These projects point to the scourge of AIDS and we could easily add the scourge of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa.

Also in Zambia, we have received a grant to extend education for hearing and/or visually impaired children to 7th and 8th grade. The attentiveness of Misesan Cara and their help in developing the project were invaluable. This included an onsite visit to understand the project, clear suggestions for revision of the proposal, multiple meetings in person and by telephone with our LO, and finally the submission of a new proposal which has been approved. This whole collaborative process is a model of what can work in development aid and in our experience Misesan Cara lives this vision in a uniquely effective way.

In João Pessoa, in Northeast Brazil, we have a well-established literacy program which has just received a grant to extend services to the sugar cane workers—a group whose rights are routinely violated. Another group will expand the services of an Integrated Education and Community Service Center run by two Irish volunteers who originally came with our sisters and who have returned to further develop a work they began more than ten years ago in a marginalized bairro in João Pessoa.

Another aspect of the Misesan Cara funding has been an organizational development grant to help our sisters and co-workers in Mozambique to develop the skills to imagine and begin projects, to seek funding, and to monitor them in a responsible way. This type of formative grant is especially important as more and more native sisters are assuming the responsibility for projects in their home countries. Again, Misesan Cara sees the need for formation of local communities if the aid is to have long-term effects.

The gender gap is an underlying factor in all of these countries and we as an Institute have identified women and children as a priority in all of our mission work. There are those who believe that educating women is the most important way to reduce poverty. For this reason, we think that integrating this perspective across the different priorities would be helpful.

Changing Context

We think the White Paper articulates well the major issues in the global context, but we now have a greater awareness of how all of these issues are interrelated—no one can be solved without also attending to the others. The shift in direction of the Rio+20 Summit illustrates this. Certainly working to help sub-Saharan Africa develop better trade relationships and to learn how to combat corruption at all levels is important. However, it is important that those efforts not support the inequalities and human rights violations that are, unfortunately, common in poor countries. From our perspective, supporting efforts like ours at the local level to empower women, develop small-scale rural agriculture, to enhance education and to foster human rights cannot be neglected. We see this as the key, “on the ground” component of your more comprehensive strategy.

Key Issues

The key issues are well-named. Because they are so intertwined, prioritization is difficult, and it is true that a strategy aimed at any one of them will affect all the others. We especially think strategies that encourage local empowerment and initiative, education and capacity-building, as well as those that address women’s needs, are crucial. We want to highlight the importance of capacity building and formation of future leaders. This needs to be a long-term commitment. Often educational opportunities are few, expensive, or of poor quality. Especially in Africa, this development of human rights and leadership is essential for the future.

Ways of Working

As part of the civil society, we are grateful for the generosity of the Irish government to us through Mísean Cara. It is true that we and groups like us are able to provide effective programs that are directly linked to the needs of the local people, with accountability and transparency, and hence in a cost-effective manner. The focus on capacity-building with recipients is crucially important and very helpful to us.

Other comments:

We are proud to be part, through Mísean Cara, of the great work done by the Irish Government in service of the poorest of the world’s people. We congratulate you on the effectiveness of your goals and programs and on this in-depth consultation and evaluation. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terezinha Cecchin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

and General Council

Terezinha Cecchin, RSHM
General Superior

