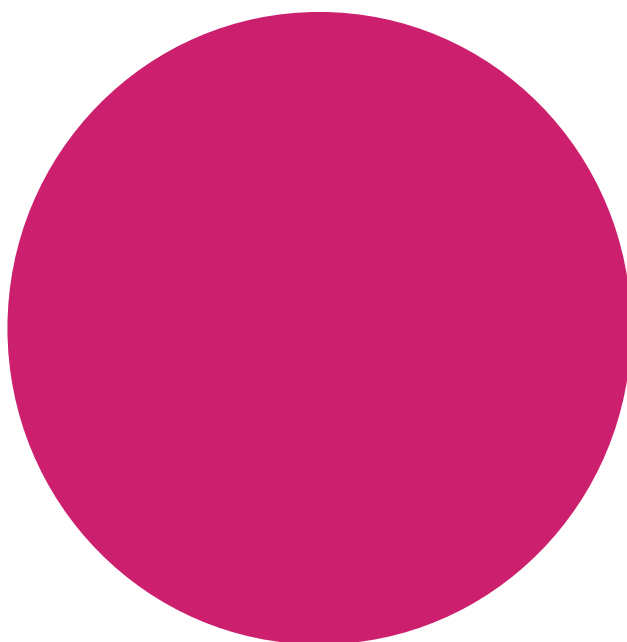


Misean Cara Learning Brief No. 2018/02

Missionary Approach to Development Interventions

Reflections on missionary and wider faith-based
approaches to development



1. Miseen Cara and the Missionary Approach

Miseen Cara is an Irish and international faith-based missionary movement working with poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities in more than 50 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Its 91 members are drawn from the breadth of the Irish missionary movement; between them have a presence in over 100 countries worldwide, and implement an estimated 4,000 projects annually. They do not necessarily see themselves as development workers in the commonly understood sense of the term, but they do the work of development and humanitarian relief. Informed by their identity as missionaries, inspired by the Gospel, and responding to God's call to work for a better life for all, they adopt a particular approach to the work that they do.

This Learning Brief is part of Miseen Cara's ongoing exploration of the Missionary Approach to Development Interventions (MADI). The document goes from the particular (the Missionary Approach), to the general (Religion and Development), while drawing on insights from a May 2018 Miseen Cara Learning Event on faith-based and missionary approaches.

The Missionary Approach is all about being there, and listening.

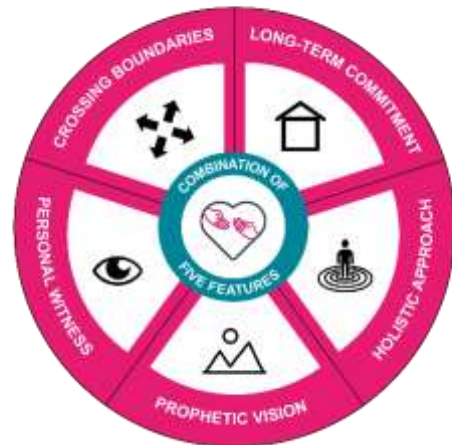
Sr. Kate Nolan, RSHM, at the Miseen Cara Learning Event

1.1 Describing the Unique Approach of Missionaries

The motto of one of Miseen Cara's membersⁱ quotes the Gospel of St. John (10:10): "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". Missionary organisationsⁱⁱ are driven to bring opportunity to poor, vulnerable and marginalised communities in developing countries, with the objective of enabling people to live full and dignified lives.

Research conducted for Miseen Cara in 2017ⁱⁱⁱ identified five key features which, when taken in combination, describe a way of doing development work that is unique to missionaries. Other development agencies, including faith-based organisations, may exhibit one or more of the characteristics, but usually not all in combination.

MISSIONARY APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT



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Figure 1 – The Five Key Features of the Missionary Approach

- 1. Crossing boundaries** as part of a global missionary movement: Being part of a global movement means that missionaries can draw on the resources of their broader missionary communities for technical, advocacy, cultural or personnel support. This feature also reflects the missionary approach of moving across various boundaries such as those of nationality, of identity, of marginalisation, of the accepted status quo.
- 2. A long-term commitment:** This provides missionaries with insight into the local context, culture and practices, and affords them a high degree of credibility, trust and influence within the communities where they work. It is linked closely to being deeply embedded in communities through a strong local presence.
- 3. A personal witness** of commitment to missionary values: exhibited through a high level of dedication to their work, a simple lifestyle and solidarity with the poor, this enables missionaries to build trust and respect in communities.
- 4. A prophetic vision:** driven by a desire for a better life for all, missionaries work with communities, building on their inherent knowledge, strengths and capacities to identify and address needs, and exploit opportunities as they arise. Missionaries are not afraid to take risks in commencing interventions or in forging pathways to new responses.
- 5. A holistic approach:** missionaries see and treat individuals and communities not just as beneficiaries of a specific project, but as dignified human beings with a wide range of capacities, needs and rights to be addressed.

1.2 Other Distinguishing Features

A number of other features are strongly associated with the development and humanitarian interventions of missionaries, though these are not always all present at the same time in a particular project.

- Working with the poorest and most vulnerable communities
- Being advocates for conflict resolution and peace
- Addressing issues of inequality and the rights of marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, people living with HIV & AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children
- A focus on spiritual and psycho-social resilience, especially at times of humanitarian crisis
- Adopting an inspiring and empowering approach
- A high degree of technical competency, for example in the realms of education and health
- An inclusive approach, leaving nobody out who is in need
- Being well linked in to local structures and authorities, with relationships built over many years.

The above features are summarised in the graphic in Annex 1. A more comprehensive reflection paper on the Missionary Approach is available from Misesan Cara's website.^{iv}

1.3 The Missionary Approach in Context

The Missionary Approach to Development is compatible with other approaches and, while distinct, is entirely coherent with a human rights focus and contemporary development practice, all three working together to acknowledge mutual responsibility, to enhance human dignity and to eradicate poverty. This dynamic is represented graphically in Figure 2.

"... faith is important for personal, familial and community strength in the face of disaster"

*Faith and Resilience after Disaster –
The Case of Typhoon Haiyan, 2015*

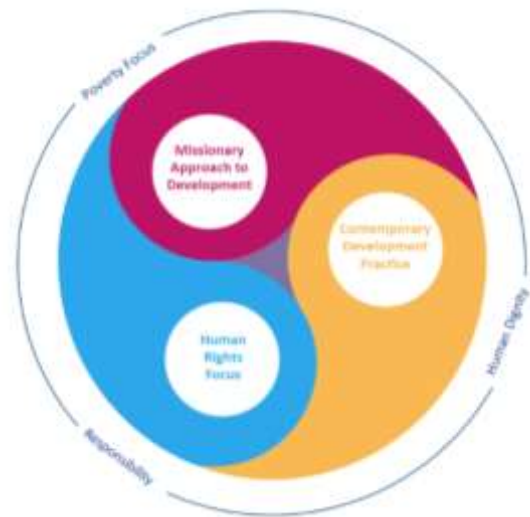


Figure 2 - The Missionary Approach in Context

1.4 Challenges for the Missionary Approach

In common with other development paradigms, working through the Missionary Approach is not without its challenges, one being the occurrence of burn-out in individuals due to the high level of personal commitment that is inherent in the missionary way of life. This challenge is particularly evident when working in remote or difficult circumstances. Again, working with very poor or isolated communities can mean a slow pace of change, perhaps with relatively few people, but the value placed on the communities encountered makes the results just as valid. Finally, many missionaries have faced the ultimate risk to their own life, remaining with communities in the midst of violent conflict. At times such as these, missionaries draw on their own reserves of faith and commitment to stay the course and see things through. For missionaries working with a holistic approach, there are sometimes ethical challenges in relation to the moral teaching of the Church, requiring the adoption of nuanced solutions.

1.5 What the Missionary Approach Means for Stakeholders

For donors, the missionary approach means the targeted delivery of a development or humanitarian intervention, often in hard-to-reach areas or with hard-to-reach groups. Missionaries work to high technical standards and their approach is based on years of accumulated experience in the sector and, importantly, in the geographical area.

For the host government, in many cases it means a centre of excellence in education, health, sustainable livelihoods or human rights, which is

often linked in with government services in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

For the most important stakeholders, the intended beneficiaries, it means that the intervention in which they are involved has been informed by an acute and holistic understanding of the challenge being addressed, an understanding to which they themselves have been the principal contributors. It is more than likely that the project involves a number of complementary activities across different sectors (e.g., education linked to a health initiative; health and nutrition linked to a livelihoods project), addressing a range of needs. Most importantly, the Missionary Approach means a long-term commitment to journey in solidarity with the community, meeting and surmounting challenges as they arise, understanding that change can sometimes take a generation to be achieved.



Outpatients wait at Mutito Clinic in rural Kitui, Kenya.

In an eloquent example of long-term commitment, the clinic has been run by Misesan Cara member the Poor Servants of the Mother of God since 1981. The clinic is still running today, 37 years later. Photo: Misesan Cara

2. Thoughts from a Learning Event

2.1 Background

Since its foundation in 2004, Misesan Cara has had a keen interest in the nature of the Missionary Approach. In 2013, it collaborated with the Irish Missionary Union, All Hallows College and Kimmage Development Studies Centre in organising an international conference on the nature and future of missionary work, *Mission Today & Tomorrow*, which brought together over 200 participants from around the world. Over recent years, Misesan Cara has accumulated a body of analysis related to this

topic, either through research focussed specifically on the Approach, through the inclusion of relevant questions in the Terms of Reference for external project evaluation work^v, and through information gathered in project funding proposals and reports.

The Missionary Approach lies within the broader spectrum of faith-based approaches to development and humanitarian work. Misesan Cara is also interested in this wider area, conducting, for example, research into how faith contributed to resilience and recovery after the destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November 2013^{vi} and Ebola in West Africa in 2014^{vii}. In Dublin in May 2018, the organisation hosted a public Learning Event on faith-based and missionary approaches. The event was attended by almost 70 people drawn from the faith-based, missionary and secular development communities and featured speakers from across the faith-based spectrum.



Speakers at the Learning Event (L to R):

Seamus O'Leary, Learning & Development Manager at Misesan Cara, described Missionary Approach to Development Interventions.

Catriona Dejean, Tearfund's Director of Strategy and Impact, spoke about the influence of faith on development and humanitarian response work, based on research undertaken to mark the organisation's 50th year.

Rick van der Woud, CEO of Dutch NGO Mensen met een Missie, based his talk on their experience of conflict resolution and peace-building work in Mindanao, the Philippines.

Sr. Kate Nolan of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary spoke of her personal experience of working as a missionary in Brazil for 32 years.

**"Missionaries have become development workers."
"[In the missionary approach], people are met where they are".**

Group Feedback at the Misesan Cara Learning Event

2.2 The Learning Event

The purpose of the event was to bring together a number of different perspectives on faith-based and missionary development and humanitarian work. The gathering was exploratory in nature; the high level of participation and the diversity of backgrounds gave an indication of the interest in the topic.

2.3 Thoughts and Insights

The following is a summary of some of the principal points arising from the presentations and subsequent group discussions.

- There was universal acknowledgment from the group discussions that the most striking aspect of faith-based and missionary approaches is the **long-term commitment** to communities. This is significant even when dealing with short-term challenges, as these are also viewed from a long-term perspective. What a missionary does in a community evolves over time as initial problems are resolved and new challenges are taken on. It was also noted that missionaries are present before, during and after humanitarian crises, in contrast to the sometimes-transient nature of secular NGO involvement. This long-term commitment is fuelled by a prophetic vision of a better world, a vision which is not prepared to accept the inevitability of inequality. In the words of one participant, intended in a positive sense, “Faith-based and missionary workers seek to do the impossible”.
- The notion of **accompaniment** came across strongly, the concept of being with a community, living in solidarity in a relationship that is **mutually transforming**. Learning is possible, and happens, for all involved in the process. There is an inherent **humility** in the missionary approach which can have an empowering effect on all concerned.
- **Churches are important to people**, in the sense of the physical building as much as in the sense of a faith community. One lesson gleaned from Tearfund’s research is that churches “are important places for the community; they are known to the community and are places where local members turn to for spiritual, physical and psychological support”. This echoed one of the lessons learned in Misesan Cara’s research into resilience in the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan, which was that faith supported resilience in two main ways, having a positive influence both on the capacity to

absorb the impact of the crisis, and to adapt to it. There was personal strength and support from prayer, and community strength and support from committed citizens serving each other. The results of that research show that “people’s faith can be inextricably woven into their perceptions of resilience”.^{viii}

- **Contemporary development practice is rooted in the missionary heritage.** The type of work called “development” today had its beginnings as part of missionary work centuries ago. While secular organisations are now predominant in the sector, there is an increasing element of balance being introduced as the centrality of faith and religion in the lives of people in developing countries is achieving greater acknowledgement in the broader development community.
- The inherent nature of the personal witness of missionaries was expressed in the comment that “**we are there as a way of life**”, by which was meant an all-encompassing commitment to the principles of living in solidarity with poor and vulnerable people, recognising and acknowledging their inherent dignity and their right to a better life.
- With particular reference to faith-based and missionary peace-building and conflict resolution work, it was noted that people who are comfortable and secure in their own faith are able to respond to that quality in others, and this can create common ground for the start of a dialogue. The trust and acceptance which are built up over a long period of time with communities are also significant in this regard. This trust leads people into a space where confidences are shared, and a **true understanding** is possible of the challenges faced by vulnerable people.
- In an era where there is a significant focus on **Value for Money**, missionaries provide just that. Living in the community and availing of an existing infrastructure, missionaries can deliver development and humanitarian interventions with minimal overheads and are ideally placed to know and target those most in need.
- Missionary organisations have made great strides in recent years in adopting **contemporary development practice** (e.g., in project cycle management, in adopting a results-based approach), and can continue to benefit from the experience and approaches of their secular counterparts.^{ix}

3. Religion and Development – a brief overview of recent thinking

This document seeks to give some insight into faith-based and missionary approaches to development and humanitarian work, but these topics are themselves just two elements in the much broader arena of religion and development.

According to the website of PaRD, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, 80% of the world's population continues to be guided by different forms of religious belief^x. For many living in an increasingly secularised Western world, where the symbols of religion are often seen as politically contentious, it can be all too easy to lose sight of the central role that faith continues to play in people's lives, and of the opportunities there are to harness the positive impact of religion for development and humanitarian interventions.

PaRD was set up in 2016 at a conference in Berlin entitled *Partners for Change – Religions and the 2030 Agenda*, but the role of religion in development and humanitarian work has been discussed for many years. A number of UN agencies met informally on the topic in 2007, in an initiative that would eventually give rise to the establishment of the UN Task Force on Religion and Development^{xi}. As part of its work towards the Millennium Development Goals, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) set up a working group on the principles of faith partnership, and in 2012 produced a guideline document on working with faith-based organisations^{xii}. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has acknowledged that, in many countries, faith-based organisations and religious leaders “are the dominant civil society actors”^{xiii}.

In a 2013 article in *The Guardian* newspaper,^{xiv} Sophie Ayling argues that “instead of regarding religion as increasingly irrelevant to the process of development, its role as a longstanding institution and dynamic actor in the process of social change is something from which today's post-modern development practitioners would do well to learn, rather than seek to avoid”.

In 2014, the World Bank renewed its engagement with faith-based and religious organisations, recognising that these organisations “are often doing the essential work on the frontlines of combatting extreme poverty, protecting the vulnerable, delivering essential services and

alleviating suffering”.^{xv} This renewal resulted in a major conference in July, 2015, co-hosted by the World Bank, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, USAID, DFID, the GHR Foundation, World Vision and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.

In August of the same year, looking forward to the Sustainable Development Goals, an article on the website of the World Economic Forum asserted that “[t]he moral and cultural proximity that FBOs^{xvi} represent in the communities they serve puts them at a distinct advantage over other CSOs in ensuring sustainable change”.^{xvii}



Kenyan Sr. Catherine Mutindi (left), of Misesan Cara member organization the Good Shepherd Sisters, talks to community members in Kolwezi, Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Sisters are running a children's rights project. Sr. Catherine sees human rights as an issue that transcends international boundaries. “How can I do nothing when my brothers and sisters suffer like this?”, she asks.

Misesan Cara is in no doubt that faith-based organisations in general, and missionary organisations in particular, have a significant contribution to make in delivering transformative development interventions in poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities throughout the world.

It was noted at the Misesan Cara Learning Event that there is a risk of homogenising the spectrum of faith-based and missionary approaches and it is true to say that, once one begins to investigate, a rich diversity can be seen to emerge between various strands of thought and practice within the spectrum. An exploration of the differences between and within the approaches is outside the scope of this Learning Brief, but it is clear that there is a lively and ongoing discussion to be had about the role of faith in development^{xviii}, involving not only organisations that are faith-based. This can lead to mutual learning and an enhancement of the work of both secular and faith-based organisations, all of which, in the end, are working to the same goal of transforming lives across the globe.

Endnotes

ⁱ The motto of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary is *Ut Vitam Habeant*

ⁱⁱ Specific missionary communities may be referred to as congregations, orders or societies, depending on the way in which they are structured. Misesan Cara members also include lay missionary agencies, leading to the use of the overall term “member organisation”.

ⁱⁱⁱ By Mike Williams, independent consultant

^{iv} *The Missionary Approach to Development Interventions (MADI) – Conceptual Framework and Current Development Context*, www.miseancara.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Missionary-Approach-Conceptual-Framework-and-Current-Context-July2018.pdf

^v External evaluations and effectiveness reviews carried out by various consultants in 2015, 2016 and 2017

^{vi} Wilkinson, Olive, 2015. Faith and Resilience after Disaster – The Case of Typhoon Haiyan. Research conducted for Misesan Cara.

^{vii} Building Trust in Crisis: An integrated psychosocial approach to Ebola Virus Disease prevention and containment carried out by the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary in Lofa County, Liberia, 2014-2016, at <http://www.miseancara.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EBOLA-RESEARCH-REPORT-Version-1.0-10-January-2018.pdf>

^{viii} Wilkinson, Olive, op. cit.

^{ix} Misesan Cara operates a funding scheme specifically for the development of members’ capacity in project cycle management and organisational development.

^x www.partner-religion-development.org/about/mission-statement/

^{xi} The full name of the Task Force is the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development.

^{xii} Department for International Development, 2012. Faith Partnership Principles – Working effectively with faith groups to fight global poverty. DFID, London & Glasgow.

^{xiii} United Nations Development Programme, 2014. UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders, UNDP, New York.

^{xiv} Ayling, S., *It’s a mistake to separate faith from development*, The Guardian, June 7th, 2013, at www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/jun/07/faith-based-and-secular-ngos-knowledge-sharing

^{xv} <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/partners/brief/faith-based-organizations>

^{xvi} Faith-based Organisations

^{xvii} Shamila Mahmood and Dr. Mohamed Ashmawey, at www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/08/how-faith-can-support-the-sustainable-development-goals/

^{xviii} See, for example, Faith and Development in Focus: Kenya, from Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, at <https://s3.amazonaws.com/berkeleycenter/170328BCWFDDFaithDevelopmentFocusKenya.pdf>

About Misesan Cara

Established in 2004, Misesan 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.

Misesan 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:

- 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.

Further expressing our desire to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised, the Strategy will see Misesan Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on targeting five groups: women, children, refugees, displaced people and people with disabilities.

Misesan Cara gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Irish Aid.



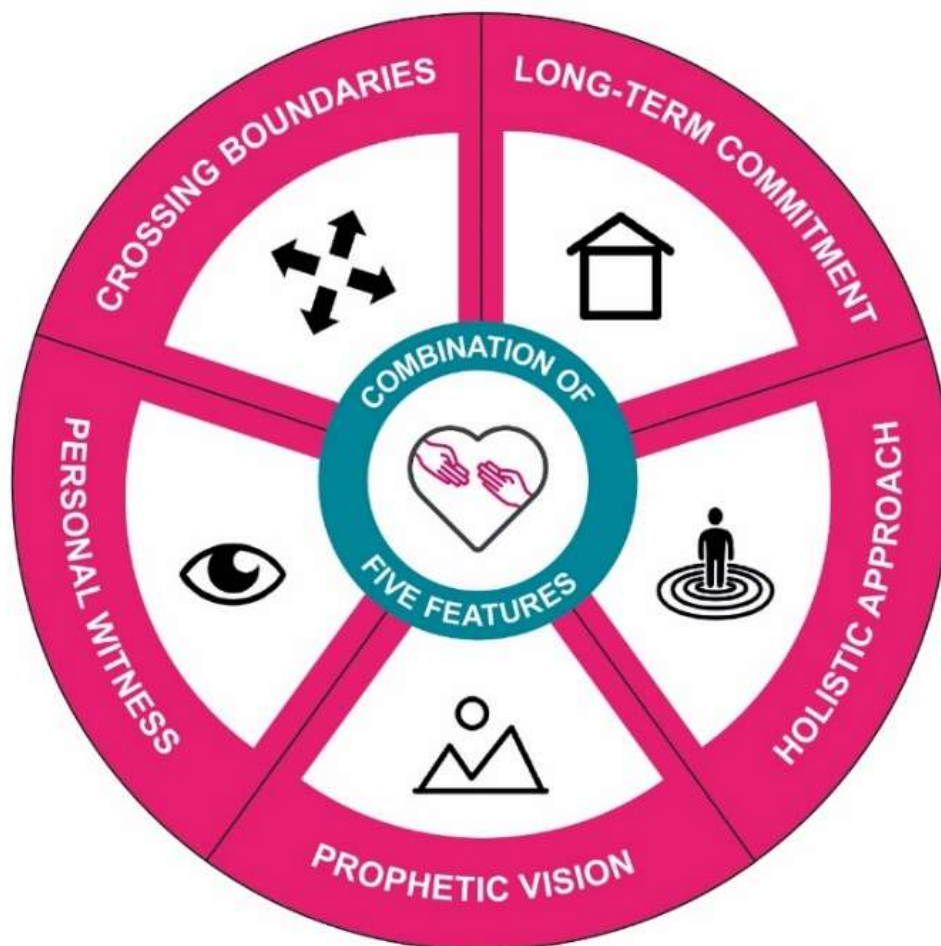
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Annex 1 – The Missionary Approach to Development Interventions

MISSIONARY APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

CORE PRINCIPLES	CHRISTIAN INSPIRATION AND ETHOS	CORE VALUES
Human Dignity	<p>Enriching and Transforming the Lives of Poor, Vulnerable and Marginalised People</p>	Respect
Social Justice		Justice
Option for the Poor		Commitment
Solidarity		Compassion
Care for Creation		Integrity



OTHER DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Targeting the Most Vulnerable	Peacebuilding	Promoting Equality	Spiritual/Psycho-social Support
Inspiring and Empowering	Technical Competency	All-Inclusive Approach	Connectivity with Stakeholders