

Leadership-in-Action (LiA) Reflection

Supporting the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs)

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Note: This reflection specifically refers to the activities conducted within the standard six-week duration of LiA projects. Please note that the reflection's details are intentionally limited due to the confidential nature of the work conducted, in strict adherence to the confidentiality agreement signed with the Special Rapporteur.

Introduction: My Leadership-in-Action (LiA) experience was a six-week project in which I served as a full-time aide to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This experience took place in the context of the alarming global crisis of internal displacement. In 2023, the world witnessed an unprecedented number of IDPs, with nearly 72 million individuals affected by this distressing phenomenon. My role was to support the Special Rapporteur in her mandate to address the human rights challenges faced by IDPs and contribute to the advancement of their rights, prevention measures, protection, and durable solutions to their state of displacement. This final reflection will explore key leadership themes that emerged during this transformative experience.

Challenge(s) faced: The most significant challenge I encountered revolved around the severe constraints on resources available for supporting the Special Rapporteur's mandate. The team dedicated to the Special Rapporteur's work consisted of only two full-time staff members, and there were limited financial resources available for recruiting additional personnel. Consequently, the daily operations of the mandate were streamlined to adhere strictly to the provisions outlined in resolution 50/6, necessitating the postponement of various potential initiatives that could have otherwise propelled the mandate forward. This challenge was particularly frustrating given the urgency and complexity of addressing the needs of IDPs worldwide, and the imperative to advocate for their rights, raise awareness about their plight, and contribute to the development of prevention and assistance policies, as well as durable solutions.

When addressing this challenge, I gained a profound understanding of the significance of adaptability, optimizing the available resources, achieving greater results with limited means, and strategically devising plans to secure funding by presenting compelling initiatives to potential donors from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Additionally, I discovered the value of collaborating closely with experts and stakeholders from the UN system and civil society who had deep knowledge of specific regions and IDP issues, enabling us to devote our time and efforts to the most urgent developments.

Leadership skills applied and developed: During this project, I applied and developed a range of leadership skills. Communication was paramount as I needed to speedily gather, analyze, synthesize, and convey complex information to diverse audiences, including the Special

Rapporteur, UN staff, civil society organizations, and the general public. This experience further refined my ability to distill information into clear and actionable insights, in particular the strategic initiatives to be pursued by the Special Rapporteur during the remainder of her tenure.

I also honed my problem-solving skills as I sought to address the day-to-day challenges faced by the mandate, most of which derived from the lack of human and financial resources. This often involved working under extremely tight deadlines, being resourceful to find additional information or assistance from UN and external actors to carry out the mandate's activities, and collaborating closely and proactively with colleagues to deliver on weekly and monthly tasks.

The limitations faced by the mandate necessitated that I assume a multitude of responsibilities within the team, spanning strategic planning, research and report drafting, and engagement with stakeholders. This multifaceted role enabled me to cultivate adaptability, flexibility, and versatility, while also enhancing my capacity for quick learning. It encouraged me to swiftly address evolving requirements, enhance my time management capabilities, and actively seek ongoing feedback to drive continuous improvement in my performance.

Cultural humility also played a crucial role in my interactions with diverse stakeholders, whether by virtue of their employer, positions, or places of origin, to mention a few factors. While at the Office of the Special Rapporteur, I recognized my own cultural biases and worked to overcome them by approaching each situation with openness and a genuine desire to learn from others and work closely with them. This allowed me to engage respectfully with diverse perspectives and fostered a sense of trust among stakeholders.

Ethical considerations: Ethical considerations presented themselves when I had to make decisions regarding the countries and subjects that should be given precedence. In the realm of human rights advocacy, particularly within the context of IDPs who faced severe humanitarian challenges, every aspect holds significance. However, the reality is that there are limited time and resources available to advocate for prevention policies, protective measures, and lasting solutions for IDPs. Personally, I grappled with determining which countries merited more extensive research, which themes warranted in-depth examination, and which displaced communities should be the primary focus. While my primary considerations were urgency and vulnerability, it was evident that there were always trade-offs to be made. This experience served as a powerful reminder of the critical importance of ethical leadership, emphasizing the imperative of prioritizing the well-being of those impacted by our actions.

Collaboration and team dynamics: Collaboration between the team and with external stakeholders was crucial. Interactions with team members at the Offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as experts from diverse backgrounds, enriched our day-to-day work. These experiences highlighted the importance of effective teamwork and the value of embracing diverse perspectives. Nonetheless, they also brought the challenges of working remotely and across time zones to surface. Overall, I learned that listening to and respecting others' viewpoints often led to more comprehensive and innovative solutions.

Conclusion: In conclusion, my LiA experience as an aide to the UN Special Rapporteur on IDPs was a profound journey of growth and learning. It illuminated the critical importance of addressing the human rights of IDPs and provided me with a platform to contribute to positive change. This experience has deeply influenced my future leadership practice. It has reinforced my commitment to promoting universal human rights, especially for marginalized and displaced populations. I have gained a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership, the significance of cultural humility, and the ethical responsibilities that come with leadership roles, particularly in the multilateral sector and the real of human rights advocacy. These insights will undoubtedly shape my future endeavours as I continue to advocate for the rights and well-being of those in need.

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