

## LiA Experience – Project Report – Summer 2

### *Reaction\_for\_impact – makesense\_americas*

#### **Project Summary**

During the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to contribute to a meaningful volunteer project with *makesense americas*, Mexico City, in their *reaction\_for\_impact* program. The program was a 6-week experience, beginning July 9th and running until August 18th. The first two weeks of the program involved us connecting with our organization, and identifying our key goals and challenges throughout the project, followed by re\_action activities in the later weeks. We were 21 scholars split into 8 teams with 8 different projects collaborating with local non-governmental organizations in Mexico City.

My project focused on the theme of community empowerment. Alongside my team of 3 members, I was assigned to work with IRRI Mexico, which is an NGO focusing on enabling access to basic goods and services of water, energy, sanitation, and food for indigenous populations in rural areas in conditions of discrimination and inequality, so that these communities can, through training, transform the basic goods and services into new sustainable community empowerment opportunities. Our goal was to increase community awareness and engagement of IRRI and its beneficiaries. We aimed to achieve this goal through a three-tier approach, that involved a social media campaign on Instagram (through interactive reels), creating infographics, and documenting two in-person events related to sustainable food practices and rainwater harvesting systems' installation.

As part of the social media campaign, we aimed to produce a variety of content such as videos and Instagram reels specifically, to not only raise awareness about the activities conducted by IRRI, but to also record videos highlighting the beneficiaries of the programs offered by the NGO. The campaign aimed at promoting IRRI Mexico on social media. Similarly, the task of creating infographics was used as a way to create informative content about the NGO that could be used on their websites, posters, and social media pages. The idea behind this was to make sure that we maintain a balance between informative and persuasive content on IRRI Mexico's social media. Lastly, visiting two in-person events conducted by the NGO helped us gain on-field insight, and also allowed us to interview the beneficiaries of the projects of IRRI Mexico, that further helped in highlighting and promoting the impact they are creating in the community.

### **Weekly Breakdown of the Experience**

#### *Week 1 - Inspiration Week*

- Visiting Farm Nuestro Huerto, an agro-sustainable community in Mexico City.
- Cultural Fair.

#### *Week 2 - Inspiration Week*

- Cleaning Xochimilco's canals by kayaking.
- Leadership Camp in Las Estacas.
- Visiting the Mazahua Community.

### *Week 3 – Meeting NGOs*

- Meeting our organization, IRRI Mexico, and drafting a project plan collaboratively.
- Cultural activity: Chocolate Museum Visit.

### *Week 4 – Meeting Volunteers*

- Project Management Workshop.
- Meeting volunteers and dividing them into groups based on different tasks.
- Drafted a plan for infographics content creation and assigned relevant tasks to the volunteers.

### *Week 5 – re\_act and evaluate*

- IRRI Xochimilco Workshop
- Impact carnival
- Nidaria Local Census
- Bio-Eco Workshop
- Inspira Detection Night
- Promesa Tetra Paks Collection
- Cultural Activity: Teotihuacan

### **Outcomes**

Eventually, we were able to increase online awareness of the organisation by creating short videos in an Instagram reel format and gained up to 200+ new followers. The infographics were not only posted on the social media channels and website, but also contributed to the inventory of content

that can be used by IRRRI Mexico in the future as well. We also had the privilege of working directly with Chinampas farming communities in Xochimilco, where we were able to engage with the stories of individuals living in rural parts of Mexico, and the impact they have felt through the initiatives made by our NGO, IRRRI Mexico.

Overall, our project was very successful. We had approximately 10 volunteers actively engaged with our activities. Some individuals contributed remotely, by designing infographics for IRRRI to be used in their promotional material, while some accompanied us during our on-ground activities. We added the carnival at Huerto Roma Verde as an extra activity aiming to increase awareness of IRRRI in the urban areas of Mexico City, and it was a really positive experience. We were not only able to engage individuals who were environmentally conscious, but also raised the profile of IRRRI Mexico and Chinampas en Movimiento through the placement of QR codes for their social media platforms and other informative resources about the work they do. Our sustainable cooking workshop gave ourselves and the volunteers an opportunity to share about Huerto Tlatelolco and IRRRI's urban agricultural diploma program.

### **Leadership Skills**

This experience significantly contributed towards my development as a leader. While the project seemed not too complex initially, we were presented with several challenges throughout the experience, and that significantly contributed towards the development of many leadership skills. It was often difficult to communicate with locals and the NGOs because of the language barrier, and this created a fear of miscommunication (although we managed to communicate effectively eventually

with the help of translators). Moreover, since we were working on multiple tasks simultaneously, time management skills were vital. We were able to complete and fulfil all the requirements for most tasks within the set deadline, and this allowed us to make sure that we are not lacking on any aspect of our project.

Working with MakeSense Americas on this volunteer project has been an enriching and transformative experience. The opportunity to collaborate with passionate individuals, contribute to a meaningful cause, and overcome challenges has left a lasting impression on me. I am grateful for the chance to be a part of such a purposeful initiative and look forward to applying the lessons learned in future endeavors.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my immense gratitude to the Laidlaw Foundation for making this possible, and the Laidlaw Scholars Program at the University of Toronto for organizing this opportunity for my growth as a leader, both through academic research and leadership-in-action. I would also like to thank the entire *makesense* team for making this program an unforgettable experience for all of the Laidlaw scholars who were there in Mexico City this summer.