

Laidlaw Programme Leadership in Action (LIA) Reflection

Scholar

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Title of LIA Project:	Tackling Climate Change in Mexico City

What was the project you have conducted during this period?

My LiA took place in Mexico City with Makesense. There, I worked on a climate change-related project aimed at tackling the climate emergency in the city. I was assigned Nidaria, an NGO (founded in 2021 by Rodrigo Gavino) which collects food waste from 40 households and converts it into animal feed to supply to farms. I worked with Cyrus, my project partner from St. Andrews University. Initially, we were supposed to have another person on our project; due to visa issues, she was unable to join us. I thought that this would be a hindrance to us as most of the other groups had three people. Nevertheless, we worked quite well together as a pair and brought into fruition the events we had planned to help Nidaria as best as we could.

We were provided with two main goals to fulfil – to run a census around the La Roma neighbourhood and to research how other cities manage their waste which Nidaria could take inspiration from to improve their services. After conversations with Regina from the Makesense team, we decided of expanding our mission and doing more to help promote Nidaria whilst also making sure that we achieve the NGO's original requests. Cyrus and I employed the design thinking process, of which we received training from the Makesense team for each stage of the iterative process. We followed each step to conduct our project in the best way possible. We

spent a great deal of time empathising and ideating to aid us with brainstorming ways to help Nidaria.

Cyrus and I decided to conduct a focus group to collect more data for Nidaria, translate Nidaria's website from Spanish to English and conduct a stall at Makesense's Impact Carnival. Despite these additions to our project, we ensured to keep the census and the research. In hindsight, we probably should not have taken on so much on our plate as I think this might have affected the quality of some of our work as we were spread too thin at times, especially since it was only the two of us working on the project. If I were to do the project again, I would maybe focus on the original mission of our project but improve further upon it, by maybe reformatting the survey to make it more user-friendly and focusing our efforts on running the census with all the volunteers. However, I would keep the translation of the website as the NGO requested for that during our second meeting. Nevertheless, I think that we made the best out of the situation and overcame every obstacle we faced. Ultimately, I know that we did all that we could to help Nidaria. Rodrigo, too, was extremely happy with our work. I hope that our work will have a long-lasting impact and help Nidaria in the long term now that we have introduced more people to the organisation and their services.

At the end, we also made sure to evaluate our project to identify what went well and what we could have done next time to improve upon it. Upon our assessment of our work, we both agreed that some of our successes was the survey, the composting bingo we did at the impact carnival and the focus group. The impact carnival, however, was something that we could have better prepared for had we known that we would only have a stall instead of a workshop where people can come in to sit to hear our presentation. Also, we could have put more volunteers to work for the census so that we could have gathered more survey responses by going around the neighbourhood instead of passing it onto group chats and posting it on social media. Withal, we managed to get over 100 survey responses, which we were happy with. Rodrigo, too, was happy with the work we did and was very grateful for our efforts.

How has the project you have been undertaking been impactful or important?

The project I undertook was important because it made people in Mexico City realise the value of food waste. Though some people see it as just waste, there are organisations, like Nidaria, that take it and create something useful out of it. Promoting Nidaria hopefully has made people realise that they can take small steps, such as separating their food waste and paying for Nidaria's collection service, to help tackle the climate emergency in the city. Alternatively, I hope that through our project, we have raised awareness about the importance of good waste management practices. Finally, it has also made me more conscious of the way I manage my waste, and my food waste and has inspired me to do better and to be better.

What impact has the LIA project had on you? Have you achieved the SMART goals as set out at the beginning of the project?

This LiA project has made me more aware of my strengths as a leader, such as effective communication, organisation and problem-solving, but also my weaknesses, including the ability to lead without authority and navigate new and foreign situations. I made sure to keep an open and constant line of communication with the volunteers to ensure that they were always well-informed. However, I sometimes found it hard to engage with my volunteers or to keep them engaged, which led to low volunteer participation and engagement. Nonetheless, we had a group of five volunteers from a pool of 24 volunteers who initially signed up for the project and we received great enthusiasm and engagement. Cyrus and I stayed organised by setting deadlines for when to complete certain tasks and making checklists so that we would not forget anything. I developed my ability to problem solve as our projects had a lot of uncertainty and questions that Cyrus and I had to tackle together. For example, we had to come up with other ways to help Nidaria, which we solved through the idea of having a focus group session as well as a stall at the Impact Carnival. I sometimes struggled to work with Cyrus as we had such a

different working style. However, I think I tried to embrace the power of diversity by separating the workload by each person's strengths. For example, Cyrus focused on the translation of the website as I am not good with making websites while I focused on conducting the census as I know some Spanish and was therefore able to converse with Mexicans.

One of my SMART goals was to successfully lead a team to tackle climate change in Mexico City by the end of the six weeks which I think I have achieved. Cyrus and I led a team of 5 volunteers to ensure we fulfilled all the events we promised Rodrigo. I was in charge of the volunteers who signed up to create flyers for the Impact Carnival. I provided them with clear instructions and set clear deadlines which they all met. I also oversaw the census and ensured that the volunteers had at least 10 people complete the survey for them to receive their certificate of participation. I spearheaded the focus group session by facilitating the event and asking questions to the participants to initiate a conversation. I could have been stricter with timings as we ran over by an hour due to the conversations sometimes getting off-topic. Cyrus was in charge of research and the website. We joined efforts for the Impact Carnival as that was our final event. I think that I managed to fulfil my SMART goal.

What leadership skills do you believe you have gained/demonstrated during the LIA period?

I think that during the LiA period, I demonstrated several leadership skills. I was able to honestly assess my leadership style by evaluating the way I led the project at the end. I realised that communication and being able to empathise with people are my strengths; I sometimes struggle with navigating new and foreign situations and effectively collaborating with people as I prefer working independently. However, during the LiA period, I improved my ability to work with others. I worked with a project partner throughout the whole project and even though we did not always see eye to eye, I learnt how to compromise and capitalise on the power of diversity and lean on each other's strengths and use that to our advantage I was able to make

things happen and bring energy and impact to everything I did. I was better at speaking clearly and confidently; I oversaw the running of the focus group session and the execution of the composting bingo at the Impact Carnival as effective communication is a strength of mine. Our composting bingo was a huge success and we saw over 100 people participate in it. It was also an effective way to capture people's attention. From there, we introduced Nidaria to them by asking Rodrigo to speak about what they do and showing a video of how Nidaria turns food waste into animal feed. It was a fun and informative activity. I was able to work and think independently, prioritise activities and manage my own time by completing urgent tasks first and turning ideas into action. I think that I need to manage my expectations and be realistic about what I can do and accomplish within such a short time frame as there are times when I feel burnt out from having too much on my plate. Something I could work on which would have made my ability to lead in the project is the ability to improve my cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy. I was able to empathise quite well, however, I think that having deeper cultural intelligence could have increased my capacity for empathy.

What are your future career or educational plans? Have these changed during your time as a scholar?

I hope to complete my Law degree and finish with a first-class degree. I also endeavour to secure a training contract or some sort of legal position after graduation. This career plan has not changed during my time as a scholar. Though after my LiA, I am now more open to working in an NGO, if I am given the opportunity I would like to be able to contribute to something bigger and help in any way that I can as a solicitor.

Upon learning about the design thinking process, I will now try to incorporate it, where relevant, and remember to always start with empathising with the people I am working for. It is comforting to know that it is an iterative process and that not being able to move on to the next stage does not mean I have failed. Instead, it just

means that I have more work with ideation and prototyping, I think that the empathise stage is particularly importance to me, given that I want to become a criminal defence solicitor. I must understand my client's position, how they feel and what they require from me to help better their situation. I enjoy working with other people, particularly when ideating. I learnt the value of how any idea is a good idea and the value of having different inputs about certain things as different people see things differently. It is useful to have someone looking at the situation from a different angle as they might be able to see things I might not be able to.

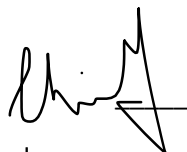
I will further develop the leadership skills I have developed from the project, such as being a good communicator and being organised. I would like to learn how to better handle stress under difficult situations, as well as how to convey my thoughts and ideas better to other people and fight for my ideas.

I would like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation for providing me with the opportunity to fly to Mexico City, conduct some impactful work and meet the most inspiring people. I would also like to thank Makesense for being so welcoming and guiding me throughout the project.

Project Leader

Please comment on your scholar's LIA period, what you consider to be your scholar's strengths and which leadership attributes (please refer to the leadership attributes below) you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which the scholar can develop further.

Signature of Scholar



Date: 11 September 2023

Signature of Project Leader

Date: ___/___/___

Leadership Attributes

Able to lead without authority

Able to convey purpose and build coalitions

Cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy

Honestly assess own knowledge/leadership style/preferences

Knows own limitations and acts accordingly

Learns continually

Speaks and writes clearly and confidently

Able to listen with understanding

Uses digital connectivity

Makes effective decisions in complex environments

Seeks out and fosters innovation and creativity

Strong intellectual ability

Turns ideas into action

Builds relationships and networks

Works collaboratively and across boundaries

Uses emotional intelligence to achieve this

Capitalises on the power of diversity

Able to navigate new and foreign situations

Uses this to build relationships and networks

Has energy and impact

Makes things happen

Able to analyse data and interpret results

Able to work and think independently

Prioritises activities and manages own time