

Laidlaw Final Reflective Report Summer 2: Lessons Learnt and Future Goals

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Impact Report on Leadership-in-Action Experience

Project goals, objectives, and outcomes:

My Leadership-in-Action project, entitled “Empowering Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Uganda”, involved a six-week internship with [Women Rights Initiative \(WORI\)](#), a Ugandan women-led, grassroots, women’s rights organisation in Jinja, Uganda. Having completed historical research on gender-based violence (GBV) in Summer 1, I felt compelled to put this theoretical knowledge into practice and to support GBV survivors in the present day. Thus, my goal with my LiA project was to give my all in the pursuit of WORI’s mission and objectives, providing my help where it was most needed, knowing that I would be empowering and supporting this marginalised women in the process.

The crux of my work revolved around resource mobilisation, that is finding reliable, sustainable funding streams for WORI. This resource mobilisation work consisted of three key strands: resource mobilisation for the Organic Demonstration Farm Project; resource mobilisation for the [Nyonga Women’s Shelter](#), the largest safe space for GBV survivors in Uganda; and business planning and capacity building for WORI’s social enterprise, [Star Durable Pads](#). The objective of my work was to begin the process of finding consistent, core funding for WORI and the invaluable, much-needed services it provides. This involved researching viable funding sources and ways in which to raise the profile of WORI locally, nationally, and internationally; networking with relevant partners, NGOs, and funders in a similar space to WORI; and applying for grants. Through this process I applied for seven grants; networked with over twenty partners; and planned, wrote, and edited the Star Durable Pads business plan.

Relevant stakeholders, events, and activities:

As mentioned above, my work contained three core pillars, which will be discussed in this section in greater detail.

Resource mobilisation for the Organic Demonstration Farm project took place at the beginning of the internship (Weeks 1-2) and focused on assisting the other Laidlaw Scholar, Mana Gana,

to complete the resource mobilisation work she had begun. The work primarily involved editing and submitting the [Gender Just Climate Solutions](#) grant application that Gana had worked on previously and searching for other relevant open calls for proposals. As part of the latter aspect of this work, I found, completed, and submitted the [RAIN Challenge for Non-Profits](#), a competition-style grant due the final day of my first week and Gana's last day with WORI.

Resource mobilisation for the Nyonga Women's Shelter represented the majority of my work, (especially in Weeks 2-3 and 5-6), given its importance in the light of the imminent end of the Open Society Foundation funding for the shelter at the end of August 2023. This involved approaching the problem of resource mobilisation from several different angles. Firstly, I had to understand how to write grant applications and letters of enquiry. Secondly, I needed to research which funders were available and suitable for funding a programme like the shelter, and to contact those without specific information about how to apply for grants for clarification. As part of this research and surveying phase, I contacted and networked with relevant organisations working in this sector in Uganda, East Africa, and in Ireland, given that I already had a network of academic and CSO contacts there. This helped to give me a greater understanding and appreciation of the NGO landscape, particularly for a grassroots organisation such as WORI. Thirdly, I chose to create a general draft proposal for the Nyonga Women's Shelter upon which to base other grant applications. Finally, I applied both for general, perpetually open funding calls by foundations and funders and, to a lesser degree, specific open calls for proposals. In total, I submitted four grant applications ([Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Strengthening Civic Space](#) grant, [Hilton Global Foundation](#) grant, [Jewish Helping Hands Tikkun Olam](#) grant, and [AWDF Leading from the South Yalla](#) grant) and a number of applications for NGO-funder networking platforms.

Planning and capacity building for the Star Durable Pads social enterprise centred on the ongoing *Building Sustainable Social Enterprises* (BSEEN) training with [GIZ](#) (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and [Capital Solutions Ltd](#) and took place from Week 2 onwards. I participated in the staff training and capacity building process, which culminated in the four-day BSEEN business planning workshop in Week 4. During the workshop, I was an active participant and was responsible for taking the notes from our discussions and working with my colleagues to complete the homework we were assigned

throughout the week. After the workshop, I was responsible for conducting the literature review, drafting many of key sections of the business plan, and editing what had already been written. I also conducted resource mobilisation for seed funding for the social enterprise, contacting potential partners, and applying for a micro grant from [Giving Joy](#).

Intended impact of the project and how it will be sustained into the future:

My work over the six weeks represented the first steps in what is a continuous process of resource mobilisation and fundraising for WORI, something that is made even more prescient in the context of the dwindling funds available for grassroots organisations. However, as part of my work I created general draft templates for grant applications for the Organic Demonstration Farm Project, Nyonga Women's Shelter, and Star Durable Pads social enterprise, all of which can be repurposed and reused for future applications. Furthermore, in my final report for WORI, I compiled an overview of the different avenues for funding and resource mobilisation available to WORI as of the end of my LiA, putting particular emphasis on upcoming funding deadlines for potentially applicable grants. This summary of the practical information gleaned from my research and networking activities over the six weeks should serve to inform and guide WORI's future work in the ever-important resource mobilisation space, hopefully lightening the load on their small team. Moreover, I was offered the position of Global Ambassador with WORI at the end of my LiA, which allows me to continue our collaboration by sharing information about WORI's work, networking with potential funders in the Global North, and continuing to assist in resource mobilisation through reviewing and editing grant applications.

General Reflection on the Laidlaw Scholarship Programme

Current perspective on what constitutes good leadership:

The Laidlaw Scholarship experience has facilitated both a consolidation and a broadening of what I consider good leadership. Over the course of the programme I have come to the conclusion that leadership is, and indeed should be, inherently people-centred, grounded in compassion and empathy, and an instrument more of empowerment of others than an exercise in self-aggrandizement. As such, the theory and practice of servant leadership which we explored in our first Lead Day is the one which has stuck with me throughout the programme and has guided how I approached the various activities of the Laidlaw

programme. I have become more sure of myself and of my abilities as a leader, particularly with regards to the need to build meaningful connections with people in order to positively affect change.

Moreover, I have learned the value of truly listening to and hearing the perspectives of others. It can be easy to veer from talking on behalf of someone to talking over them, but if you wish to work with and empower those who are the most marginalised, vulnerable, and unheard in our society, you must break these patterns. To me, leadership does not mean being the loudest person in the room, but rather the person who can bring the others in the room along with them. On a related note, I have realised the importance of discovering what your core values are, so as to understand what drives you and what frames your leadership. When you remain true to yourself and to what is important to you, you are able to lead authentically and meaningfully. This means that no matter what obstacles or challenges you are confronted with, you will have the resilience, determination, and self-compassion needed to reach your goals and the goals of the community you are supporting.

Leadership development over the course of the programme:

My experience with the Laidlaw Scholarship has confirmed to me that what drives me is a genuine desire to make a positive difference in the world, by uplifting and supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society. I am now more sure of myself and of my abilities and have a much deeper understanding of what drives me and what is important to me. Crucially, I now have the skills and experience to put these ideas and goals into action.

However, this leadership development has not been without its challenges. As outlined in my previous summer's Reflective Report, self-belief has consistently been my biggest obstacle. In my first summer, during the research project, I struggled with feeling that my research was not of value and that I was not the right person to be doing it. In my second summer, during my LiA, I also felt this sense of "imposter syndrome", questioning whether I had anything of value to bring to my work with WORI, particularly as a mere 21-year-old college student. These feelings are certainly not new to me, but the Laidlaw programme has forced me to confront them and deal with them head on. In the process, I have learned to focus on what I can do and what I can offer, rather than what I cannot do. Moreover, my biggest take away from my Laidlaw experience has been the need for self-care and self-compassion, given that both

summers involved emotionally intense projects about which I cared deeply. I have endeavoured to bring this learning into all aspects of my life, personal, academic, and professional. While I am certainly not an expert, nor do I practice self-compassion at all times, I am now in a much better position to recognise these negative feelings, take a step back, reflect, and be kind to myself. Furthermore, from talking to other Laidlaw scholars over the last 18 months, I have been over-awed by their supportiveness and our collective ability to be open and honest with each other about our concerns, struggles, and successes during the programme. The comradery and companionship I have found amongst fellow driven, passionate, young leaders has been one of the highlights of my Laidlaw experience. Indeed, I have found that I have learned as much from my peers as I have from the activities of the programme itself.

My LiA with Women Rights Initiative (WORI) represents to me the encapsulation of my development over the course of the Laidlaw process, exemplifying the synthesis and practical implementation of the academic, leadership, and interpersonal skills I had been cultivating. It enabled me to put into practice the academic skills gained from my Summer 1 research, my leadership development from the Lead Days, and the many conversations I had had with my fellow Laidlaw Scholars, Laidlaw supervisor, friends, and family about cultural competency and resilience. Furthermore, the very nature of the scholarship, and the way in which I have approached it, has challenged me to put myself in the shoes of others and to question what it really means to make a difference and how best I can centre those whom I am trying to empower in my work. Indeed, the overall theme of my Laidlaw Scholarship experience has been empowering and centring marginalised women across national boundaries, whose voices and trauma have traditionally gone unheard. By combining historical research with practical work on the ground, I have had to question what it means to come from the privilege that I do and how I can best use the opportunities afforded to me to bring marginalised, vulnerable groups along with me, leaving no-one behind and no-one unheard; which is exactly what a good leader must do.

Future steps:

The Laidlaw Programme has given me the skills, experience, and confidence to pursue my goals and ambitions in a meaningful, considered, and compassionate manner. I am more sure

than ever that if I continue to approach my future projects with the same level of care, dedication, and empathy, I will be able to make a real difference in the world around me, no matter how big or small that may be. This experience has inspired a change in how I envision my future career and academic pursuits, confirming to me that continuing a focus on gender in my research and a commitment to practically and meaningfully uplifting marginalised women is where my passions lie. I look forward to completing a Master's degree in Gender Studies/Gender and Development next year and I am excited to see where the values consolidated through the Laidlaw Scholarship take me. I have taken the first step towards creating positive change: I am now ready to take the next one.