

## **LiA Impact Report 2024: “Making Impact Visible” with SOS Children’s Villages Switzerland and Nepal – Luke Pätzold**

For my Leadership in Action project, further referred to as LiA, I spent four weeks in four different places around Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara, Itahari, and Lahan. The LiA was organised in coordination with SOS Children’s Villages Switzerland, and we were mainly in touch with Head of Philanthropy and Partnerships Marc Kempe and their Content Manager David Becker. In Nepal, we worked with SOS Children’s Villages Nepal to create sponsorship content for SOS Children’s Villages Switzerland as part of the central LiA: “Making Impact Visible.” I was joined by two other Laidlaw Scholars and worked closely with the national SOS Children’s Villages team and the local teams in each of the locations in Nepal.

In this reflection, I will explore my leadership journey, specifically the challenges I faced throughout this LiA, the leadership skills I applied and developed, and the ethical considerations I was confronted with, and I will reflect on the collaboration and team dynamics.

The project’s main goal was, as stated, to make impact visible, which meant to show which opportunities support from the organisation creates for the children and other programme participants and why it is of the utmost importance that the NGO receives continuous funding in the future. SOS Children’s Villages Nepal is reliant on funding from the European branches of the organisation, mainly SOS Children’s Villages Switzerland, and the videos and photos we created will go towards sponsorship generation and will be used in showcasing the different projects around Nepal.

The main challenge I and my fellow scholars seemed to face wherever we went was closely intertwined with the question of cultural humility. At times we would encounter some communication challenges. These were usually not work-related, but we encountered them, e.g., in relation to the food culture. In Nepal, hospitality and the polite treatment of guests are of the highest importance. This usually meant huge portions of food, and you would be given food two or three more times after finishing your first plate. We did not want to be rude when we were given or offered more food, so in the beginning we often accepted the offers. At the same time, however, it was considered rude to leave food on your plate, but we could not

finish three portions. In the beginning, and even later when we were around new people, it was sometimes difficult to communicate this, as it often caused the worry that we did not like the food for those who had offered it to us. We had to keep reassuring that this was not the case and that we could simply not eat that much. After a while, it was clear to both sides that it was simply a cultural difference and that neither side had to worry. We did not have to worry about seeming rude, and the others did not have to worry that we did not want refills because we did not like their food.

This taught me, on the one hand, that simple cultural differences can potentially lead to big misunderstandings, but that those misunderstandings can be prevented by simply communicating and identifying the cultural difference as one.

The other leadership skills that I got to apply next to the already discussed cultural humility and communication were numerous. As our work involved so many different people, locations, expectations, and also technical equipment, it required a lot of flexibility and sometimes problem-solving skills. The aspect of teamwork, which of course is one of the most important features, will be discussed separately further below.

Ethical considerations were a grave part already during my application process for the LiA. One of the main ethical considerations I felt confronted with on the trip and which was already discussed during the application process as well, was the fact that we were visiting community-based projects and the Children's Villages, which meant that I was entering the personal environment of often very vulnerable families or persons. Additionally, I was bringing a camera and recording them and their personal environment.

A few times, during the interview processes, moments would arise where it felt to us as if the person being interviewed was not comfortable and might not have been in a state to give the interview. While they had agreed to the interview and given consent beforehand, their body language told a different story. It was very important to recognise these moments and handle them in a respectful manner that would put the individual and their comfort at the centre.

This specifically taught me about ethical leadership – that sometimes the gut feeling and non-verbal communication can tell you a lot, although the person might agree or tell you something else. In such vulnerable settings, it is important to recognise these moments and give the person the opportunity to change their opinion or go back on what they have said, even if they might not be able to express this clearly themselves.

My interactions with all the team members were very friendly and welcoming. Everyone was always open to answering any questions, and at any time of the day we had someone to turn to. As we also spent our sightseeing days and days off with members of the team, we also enjoyed getting to know them, their country, and their culture on a more personal level, which helped me get to know all the facets of Nepali culture and the different cultures of a selection of the hundreds of Nepali ethnic groups.

Within our Laidlaw Scholars team, we often talked about how surprised we were, as often everything just seemed to work out very well and everyone just knew what to do and what their position on the team was. At the same time, we made sure that we would check in with everyone in case they wanted to take on another task different from the one they had done before, and we naturally let someone take the lead during the shoots and noticed that at different times different people would step in so that in the end, everyone got to take the lead or work in a certain position of their choice.

I was very glad that if there was something that someone did not like about the process, this was openly communicated before it might have turned into a bigger challenge or built up over time, which reinforced my impression that communication is key and timely communication can solve “problems” or challenges before they might even turn into one.

In summary, I can say that one of the main takeaways, which I still reflect on weeks later, is that I have become more sensitive to recognising and/or understanding how many interactions throughout my daily life are shaped by cultural differences.

While I will never be able to experience this exact trip again, I hope to experience many more cultural interactions, places, and people on such a meaningful level.