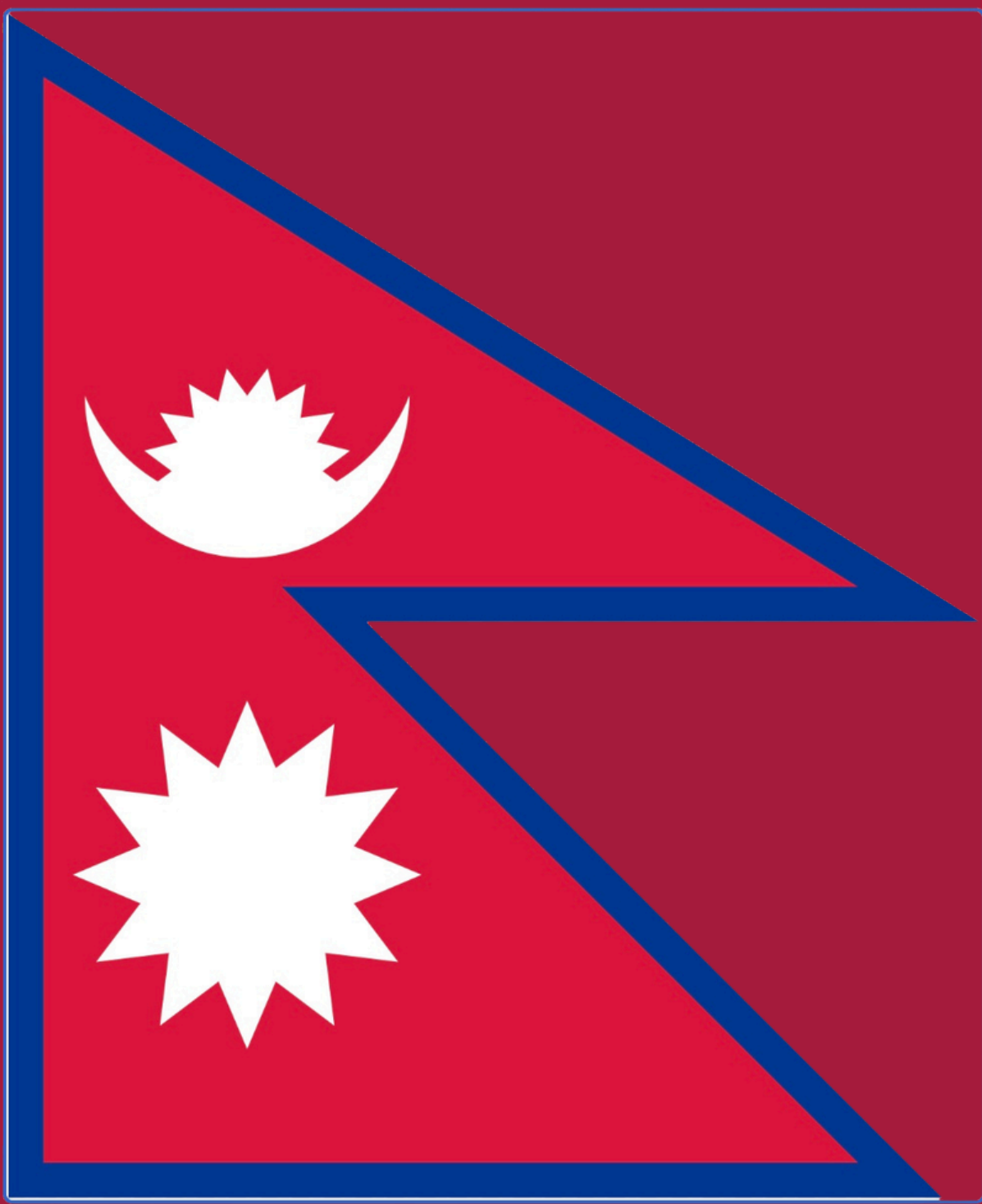


Making Impact Visible

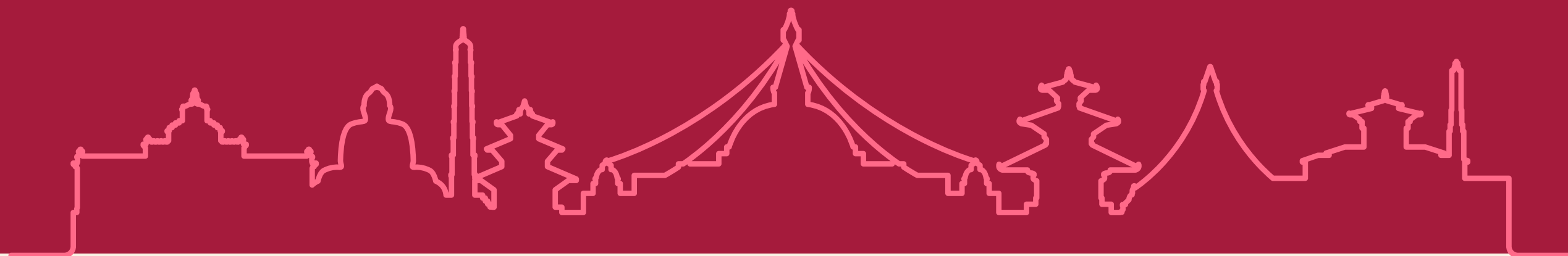
LEADERSHIP-IN-ACTION

2026: NEPAL



SOS Children's Villages has been working in Nepal since the late 1960s, providing loving homes for children without parental care and strengthening vulnerable families across ten locations. For this LiA project, I and other 2 Laidlaw scholars collaborated with the SOS Nepal team to produce photographs, videos, and short reports that showcase the organization's impact on the ground. My role was to document daily life in SOS Children's Villages and community-based Family Strengthening programmes — capturing stories of children, caregivers, and families to help inform current and potential donors about how their contributions are used. Over four weeks, we travelled from Kathmandu to Itahari, Lahan, Ganeshman Charnath, and Karjanha, creating visual content ranging from alternative care to education, nutrition, and income-strengthening measures.

Zhao Shurong Emma



Children's Villages

SOS Children's Villages provides alternative care. One main form is Family-Like Care (FLC). In Itahari, 14 family houses support 104 children under the care of trained caregivers. We documented daily routines—morning hygiene, homework support, group play, and candid moments between children and caregivers. The Itahari SOS Children's Village also includes a school that covers primary through high school education. Its students come from both the SOS village and nearby communities. We interviewed several students, who were highly motivated, kind, and positive.

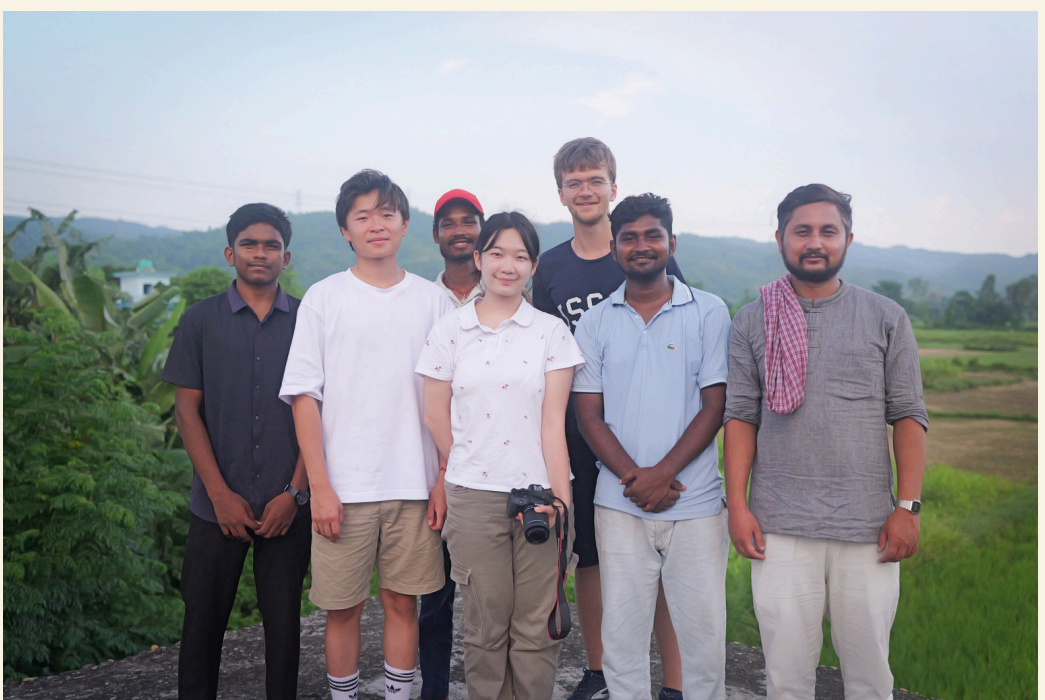


SMART GOALS

- Create impactful visual content**
Produce high-quality photos, videos, and short narratives that authentically showcase SOS's work in alternative care, education, health support, family strengthening, and community development across multiple Nepalese project sites.
- Practice ethical storytelling with children**
Prioritize children's safety, privacy, dignity, and comfort in all filming and photography; build trust through genuine connection and represent stories with sensitivity and empathy.
- Strengthen cross-cultural collaboration & leadership**
Work closely with local SOS staff, translators, and fellow Laidlaw scholars to plan, coordinate, and deliver content; lead creative production and post-processing with initiative and accountability.

Community-based Family Strengthening programmes

SOS Children's Villages' focus on alternative care has evolved into a **holistic approach** that includes family strengthening, youth empowerment, and advocacy for systemic change. We spent most of our days in **Madesh Province**, in southern Nepal. The Community-Based Family Strengthening Programme (CBFSP) was extended to Madesh Province in 2024 across three locations: Lahan, Ganeshman Charnath, and Karjanha. Support includes direct livelihood support (such as livestock to help increase income and self-reliance at the same time), community education (nutrition, sanitation awareness, menstrual hygiene sessions, childcare, and child rights), and other administrative support (helping families acquire required documents such as citizenship, birth certificates, marriage certificates, and migration papers; legal support against domestic and gender-based violence; and persuading and helping out-of-school children continue their education, among other services). We interviewed people who received support, local staff, and child club members, who also played a role in connecting the community.



Reflection

I feel incredibly fortunate to have met the people I did this summer and to have learned how SOS Children's Villages partners with communities to create lasting change. The local staff were warm, responsible, and honest. The children in Itahari were curious, brave, and full of energy. One girl said to me, "Remember me." I will. This has been the most memorable August of my life. As a photographer, I kept asking: what should be present in an image?



Through conversation and connection, I became more intentional and attentive to change-making and to the brighter sides of people's lives. My time in Nepal also made me reflect on how photography is used in humanitarian organizations' communications and fundraising. When I take photos as an outsider, am I looking through a lens of pity? Am I capturing performance? How can I photograph with empathy and respect? The other Laidlaw scholars showed me a better way. Before interviews or photos, they patiently introduced themselves, talked with people, and built real rapport. Observing them changed how I view my work and how I want to approach it. One moment has stayed with me. While taking a family photo, I asked everyone to move closer together, hoping for some physical touch that would convey closeness. Another scholar gently reminded me that there might be subtle cultural differences around physical distance. I was impressed by his cultural sensitivity. It is so true: when working across cultures, we often default to our own perspective instead of trying to understand someone else's. This experience showed me how essential cultural intelligence is in cross-cultural collaboration. More broadly, I am deeply impressed by Nepali culture, religion, food, rituals, and people. I feel incredibly lucky to have spent this summer in Nepal. The experience gave me not only lasting memories and friendships, but also a clearer sense of the kind of storyteller and collaborator I want to become.

Behind the Scenes

Much of our filming involved capturing people speaking in Nepali and Maithili, and we worked closely with the SOS team to translate and transcribe stories accurately. We collaborated with local staff, joined table tennis games, learned to make momos, and interviewed child club members. These experiences shaped both our footage and our understanding of SOS's mission.



Acknowledgements
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