

# My Laidlaw Journey: Leadership, Global Citizenship and Learning to Create Impact

When I first started the Laidlaw Scholarship, I think my understanding of leadership was much simpler than it is now. I associated leadership with being confident, taking responsibility and being able to guide a team towards an outcome.

Throughout the Scholarship, and particularly through my Leadership in Action project in Mexico City, I have realised that leadership is much more about how you respond to people, uncertainty and unfamiliar situations. It requires you to listen, adapt and recognise when the best contribution you can make is not necessarily to have the answer, but to help create the conditions for other people to find one.

Looking back at my experience through Laidlaw's 3Cs framework, I can see the biggest changes in my **character, my change-maker values and my leadership capacities**.

## Character

One of the biggest things I have developed is adaptability.

For my Leadership in Action project, I spent six weeks in Mexico City working with make\_sense Americas and Genera Territorios, an organisation supporting rural and indigenous women to develop greater financial independence and financial literacy.

I was working in a different country, in a different cultural environment and on an issue that I had never worked on before. That meant accepting quite quickly that I was not going to understand everything immediately.

I learnt to be more comfortable with uncertainty and to ask questions before making assumptions.

That was particularly important because we were designing something for communities whose experiences were very different from our own. It would have been easy to arrive with our own idea of what a good solution looked like. Instead, I learnt the importance of listening to local knowledge and designing with people rather than simply for them.

That has made humility a much more important part of how I now understand leadership.

## Change-Maker Values

The project also challenged me to be curious and ambitious while remaining realistic about what meaningful impact looks like.

Our team developed *Izcalli*, an AI-supported conversational programme designed to make financial education more accessible. We created an eight-week curriculum covering subjects including saving, budgeting, debt, loans and individual and collective goals.

Initially, it was tempting to think about impact in terms of what we could build.

But I began to realise that the technology itself was not the impact.

What mattered was whether somebody could actually use it and whether it responded to a genuine need.

Three volunteers from Mexico City helped us develop the project and contributed to video content used within the programme. That experience reinforced something that I want to take into my future work: innovation should not mean imposing the most technically impressive solution. Sometimes the better solution is the simpler, more accessible and more human one.

## **Capacities**

The Scholarship has also developed my practical leadership capacities.

Working in a team strengthened my communication and collaboration skills. Building the chatbot through Voiceflow developed my technical abilities, while creating financial education content required us to turn complicated ideas into information that was clear, approachable and useful.

We also presented our work to Oxfam Mexico, which pushed me to communicate our project professionally and explain not only what we had produced, but why it mattered.

I have become much more aware that leadership involves being able to communicate across different audiences and perspectives.

Perhaps more importantly, I learnt that collaboration does not mean everybody thinking in the same way. Good teamwork often comes from different viewpoints being challenged and combined.

## **Developing a Global Mindset**

Living and working in Mexico also changed my understanding of what having a global mindset actually means.

Before Laidlaw, I probably understood global citizenship mainly as being interested in other countries and international issues.

Now I see it as something much more active.

Being a global citizen means recognising that challenges such as gender inequality, financial exclusion and sustainability are global, but the way they are experienced is intensely local.

Solutions therefore cannot simply be transferred from one place to another.

Working in Mexico taught me to pay more attention to cultural context, to listen before assuming and to recognise the value of knowledge that comes from lived experience rather than only academic or professional expertise.

It also made me think more carefully about my own position when working internationally. Ethical leadership requires acknowledging what you do not know and making sure that the people affected by decisions have a meaningful role in making them.

## **What Comes Next**

The biggest thing I want to carry forward from the Scholarship is this idea that leadership should ultimately be useful to other people.

I want to continue working internationally, learning from people whose backgrounds and experiences are different from mine and using technology responsibly to help address real social challenges.

I also want to remain conscious of the ethical implications of technologies such as AI. Just because something can be automated does not necessarily mean it should be. Technology should increase people's agency rather than remove it.

For me, continuing to act as a global citizen means remaining curious, questioning my assumptions and seeking opportunities to contribute beyond my immediate environment.

And continuing to lead ethically means remembering one of the most important lessons I have taken from Laidlaw:

Leadership is not about being the person with all the answers.

It is about having the character to listen, the capacity to act and the determination to create change alongside other people.

That is probably the biggest difference between the person who started the Laidlaw Scholarship and the person I am at the end of it.