

A Case Study of Migrant Children at Baity Center, Enrolled in Public System Through Civil Society Organisation, Delivering Integrated Services – Arousing Lives - From Dust to Dawn

Nuzhat Rafique^{1*}, Waleed Albarghathi², Rakha Badi³, May Abdulwanis⁴, Ahsan Maqbool Ahmad⁵

¹*Chief of Field office UNICEF Benghazi, Libya. Researcher and DPHA student at School of Public Health, Texila American University, Georgetown, Guyana, South America*

²*Future Makers Society -Civil society organisation, The project Director Future Makers, Benghazi, Libya*

³*Future Makers Society Baity center project, Benghazi, Libya*

⁴*UNICEF, Benghazi, Libya*

⁵*Center for Global Public Health, Pakistan & Institute of Global Public Health, University of Manitoba, Canada*

Abstract

From “Dust to Dawn” a case study of 10 migrant children, to eastern Libya from Egypt, Syria and Sudan. The stories of six boys and four girl, highlight the efforts and potential of a civil society organisation and its role in bringing these children from extreme vulnerability to the mainstream of public system and realization of their basic right – getting access to education, health, protection, wellbeing, and opportunities to develop to their full potential. This case study is nested in the Baity center “My Home” project, operational research to see the feasibility of a cross sectoral integrated services package for the vulnerable children under one roof. Future Makers, an infant civil society organisation in East Libya, operational since 2011 civil conflict implemented the project. In Libya, like other conflict affected countries, migrants, refugees and IDPs face difficulty in accessing education, health, and protection rights due to multiple factors. During first year, Future makers delivered services to more than 700 children in need through Baity center, extending their services to families in case of gender-based violence and MH issues. Case study elaborates the challenges of young migrant children and restrictive policies in Libya which poses difficulties to them in accessing basic rights. It is also tribute to Future makers who had been able to bring these children out of the dust and showed them a brighter dawn - to look forward to a beautiful future, under the rising sun.

Keywords: Access To Education, Child’s Rights, Civil Society Organizations, Vulnerable Children.

Introduction

Since decades, Libya has been an attractive launching point for the migrants streaming into Europe [1]. Libya has been a transit Hub, and remains, a key actor when it comes to sub-Saharan migration to Europe – both for migrants and for Europe’s attempts to control these migrants [2]. The country has also been a destination country for individuals fleeing

conflict and persecution or seeking an escape from extreme poverty; lack of access to economic, social, and cultural rights; and other human rights violations. [3] During COVID 19 epidemic, A greater proportion of unemployed migrants continue to report being unable to meet their needs than those who are employed. For instance, a larger proportion of unemployed migrants reported facing food insecurity, financial issues or lacking access to safe

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***Corresponding Author:** nrafique@unicef.org

drinking water than those who were employed. During COVID 19 pandemic the trend continued from neighbouring countries through illegal migration processes [4].

When in-country conflicts and war erupted in 2011, the situation did not change and both legal as well as illegal immigrants continued to come to Libya. There is a deep-rooted network of human smuggling in the border areas, that further complicates the issues of illegal migration in particular. UN agencies with the network of international and national NGOs in Libya, one of the most prominent transit sites, navigate their dual roles as migration managers and humanitarian actors.[5] Women and children are the most vulnerable people among these migrants who don't have an easy access to basic facilities and for those who are non-Arabs speaking due to their language barrier and legal status in the country.

To serve these children on the move, UNICEF initiated the *Baity center Project* in 2021, which was operational research to test a strategy for delivering integrated package of services for children and mainstreaming the migrant and refugees' children into public systems. This was the first collaboration with a local civil society organisation and Ministry of Social Affairs in the east. The integration includes these children gaining normality as civil citizens and enable them to grow to their maximum potential in a healthy enabling positive environment with access to all basic services. This strategy included multiple partners, and cross sectoral service provision for the migrant and refugees and IDPs as most vulnerable groups in Libya, especially focusing on out of school children among both Libyan and migrant communities.

Libya faces major issues of legal and illegal migrant and refugees in the whole country, and about 34% comes directly to the east, those entering from South also ends up in the main cities of east including Benghazi and Ajdabiya. These migrant communities face numerous challenges in terms of settling down and having

a access to basic rights for their children including education, health and protection. The main issues hindering migrants' access to education services were related to admission policies, language for Arabic speakers, affordability for transportation and safety of access. To ensure that the rights of every child are met, especially the most vulnerable like migrant and refugees, this operational research was initiated to deliver a multi-sectoral services & resilience building program for vulnerable children in Gwarsha area of Benghazi through local civil society organisation. Including host communities, internally displaced families from war affected areas. Migrant and refugee children in Benghazi were served through Baity Center, which is a safe child friendly spaces to fulfil their education, health and protection needs and hence enabled them to achieve their true potential as a successful approach.

Migrants mostly belong to neighboring countries, who are either poor or conflict affected populations.[6] Some migrants are in transit phase trying to escape to European countries through Libya that involves human trafficking as well. Human trafficking is adversely affecting the migration process and complicating the situation within country and at borders where we find migrant women and children pushed back into sea, and commonly die of unbearable circumstances either in the waters of Mediterranean or in the deserts of Libya. [5,6] Government policies about migrants and refugees is very strict and restricted to keep their non-Libyan status even years after staying in the country [7,8]. Getting admission into public schools, health care or getting psychosocial mental health support for these children and families is as hard as getting shelter, food and freedom to work in Libya for the parents and elders in the family [7,8]. According to WHO, in August 2021 bulletin, 2021 PMR (Periodic Monitoring Report) related indicators of July showed that total medical procedures provided were 35,141,

including outpatient consultations, referrals, mental health, trauma consultations, deliveries, physical rehabilitation.[9] This reflects the high need for mental and physical health in communities.

“Baity center” that means “Home” in Arabic was established in a densely populated area of Benghazi, where migrant, refugees and IDPs reside. An integrated package of cross sectoral services including health, non-formal education, and child protection services (MHPSS; mental health and psychosocial support for children and mothers, prevention against violence and case management for any gender-based violence) was delivered through outreach and centre-based services. One local NGO, *Future Makers*, was involved in establishing and running the centers. Technical experts from UNICEF supported the project along with funding stream.

Baity centers are the ray of hope for us and these children to get them mainstreamed into Public health systems in the country and is anticipated to help ensure their access to health, education, protection from violence and abuse and provide them enabling environment to grow to their best potential.

Study Population and Social Environment

Study was to observe acceptability, effectiveness, and public health administrative aspects of integrated services package delivery to the vulnerable Libyan, migrant and refugee children, through community based Baity center in east Libya, Benghazi, as a humanitarian context.

Specific objectives of the study were to assess the effect of an integrated multisectoral interventional strategy for service delivery to most vulnerable migrant, refugees, IDPs and OOS children, in east Libya and how it can help in realization of the child’s rights. It also aimed at contribution of multisectoral intervention with special focus on protection and education for mainstreaming of migrants, refugees’

children into public systems in East Libya like admission of non-Libyans into public school system. Target number of children for 1 year project duration was 550, app 100 to 150 per quarter, which did overshoot to more than 700, aged between 5 years to 17 years. Children studying in Grades/Class 1 to class 4 and elementary level depending upon the enrolment and needs, who were eligible for inclusion. Case study of the 10 children is nested with in the first year, efforts with more than 700 children in Baity center.

Information Gathering and Description of Activities

This project was designed as interventional study /operational research to test an integrated, multi sectoral intervention to deliver basic services for the vulnerable children in the East of Libya, Benghazi, Gwarsha area.

It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Survey focus group discussion and in-depth interviews were used as research tools.

A theoretical framework for the Baity center was developed based on few such examples from other countries. This project was practically established with one center in Benghazi and based on the success, was scaled up systematically with implementation of standard package in collaboration with Ministry of social affair, in areas with deprived groups of population.

Intervention focused on most vulnerable Libyan and non-Libyan children to protect their basic rights and integrate in the public systems and society as a productive citizen in future. Intervention is an integrated package of multisectoral services including education, health and protection services, delivered to approximately 700 children both Libyan and non-Libyan, out of school, age 5 to 17 years, enrolled in Baity center (My home).

Initially, estimated number of enrollments were 100 to 200 per session and a total of 3 sessions expected in one year – each batch for

3 months and totaling to approximately 600 children in one year. Months of stay in center was at least 3 months per child depending upon the needs or opportunity to be incorporated into public school system. However due to the high demand in community, more than 700 children were enrolled and benefited from the cross sectoral intervention package.

This primary research was a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, in which qualitative aspects were expected to change with intervention time more than the quantitative elements. One of the key expected outcomes was “Children receiving information and education to catch up with the loss of educational time during migration/movement process for IDPs and getting admission in the public school system according to their age”. The case study of the group 10 children, status reflected in Figure 1, is derived from this outcome when these 6 boys and 4 girls were enabled to get admission in public schools and continue their education towards a brighter future, initiated from Baity center and endless efforts of Future makers.

These variables, through specific indicators were used to assess the acceptability of interventions, trends in taking up services and assessing the financial requirement for the scale up as an evidence base for possible future resource mobilisation.

Qualitative information was collected throughout the course through regular and periodic resources to understand the reasons, benefits, fears and community perceptions about the program. Gender based outcome comparison within enrolled group was also done as a part of analysis.

To look at the added value of this interventional program, children from the same communities or similar context in other part of city, who could not access any institution/ Baity center, their parents and communities were included in the FGDs to see the progress and compare the services availability for out of Baity centers children in Benghazi especially in the area surrounding Baity center.

Results related to case study of 10 children

Figure 1 shows the composition of the 10 children by gender and migrant status, and Table 1 shows their demographic characters. Group of 6 boys and 4 girls, non-Libyan, out of school started from different semesters of Baity center during the first year of its establishment, started from March 2021, were enrolled in public schools through Baity center.

Though, school admission policies in Libya are not favorable for non-Libyan children but it's the facilitation process that made it possible for the children to be integrated into the public education system.

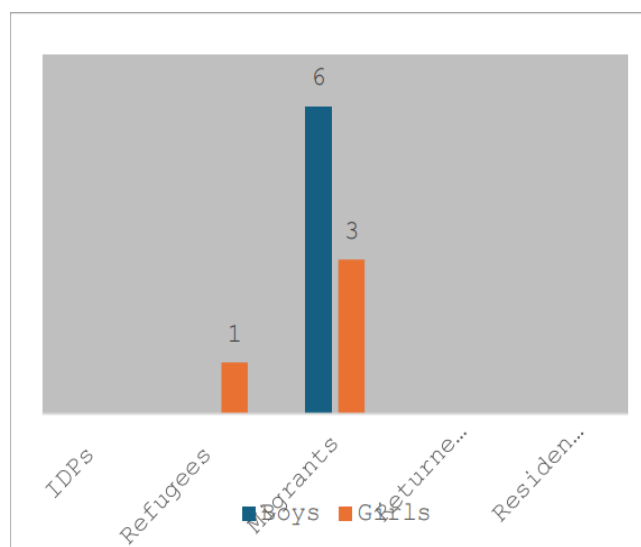


Figure 1. Children Enrolled in Public Schools

Table 1: Demographics and Services Accessed by Children Enrolled in Public Schools

Children /anonymous	Age	Sex	Classes attended	PSS sessions conducted	Health screening	Life skills classes	Taken up in grade
Child 1	2008	Female	Sixth grade	12	Yes	8	Sixth grade
Child 2	2011	Female	Fifth grade	12	Yes	8	Fifth grade
Child 3	2005	Female	Seventh grade	14	Yes	8	Seventh grade
Child 4	2011	Male	Fifth grade	16	Yes	8	Fifth grade
Child 5	2010	Male	Fourth grade	16	Yes	8	Fourth grade
Child 6	2016	Female	First grade	16	Yes	8	First grade
Child 7	2008	Male	Eighth grade	16	Yes	8	Eighth grade
Child 8	2010	Male	Sixth grade	16	Yes	8	Sixth grade
Child 9	2015	Male	First grade	16	Yes	8	First grade
Child 10	2014	Male	First grade	16	Yes	8	First grade

Regardless of the difficulties and challenges that the Future Makers Society faced in registering students due to the lack of their documents and the necessary papers to register them in the public schools, Future Makers Society got 10 children, six boys and four girls, got enrolled in the public schools, from different nationalities: Egyptian (6), Sudanese (3), and Syrian (1).

The key information about the families , migration process, initial and final settlement were detailed by the outreach teams who were mostly in contact with families and trying to address the challenges of access to Baity center and children's involvement in the non formal education process. Few children were interviewed indepth for their journeys, after their admission in schools.

All children belonging to Syrian (3), Sudanese or Egyptian families faced similar problem during the migration process. All migrated for the economic reasons. Journey was rough and mostly first settlement was in the coastal border municipalities. Three families out of 10 reported setting in Tripoli initially, the capital , situated in west of Libya. The final

destination was Gwarsha area in Bneghazi where they got access to non formal education in Baity center. Most of the boys were involved in child labor with their father , mother or on their own serving as an earlning member of the family whre as girls were also involved in domestic work with their mothers at own home or in host communities for financial gains. Table 1 shows the extent and variety of servcies that each child received at Baity Center during their enrollment period of one quarter or extended period as per need. Once outreach team form Baity center facilitated their entery test and enrollment in the Baity center , their journey towards new future started.

One of the boys, aged 11 years old, living with his parents and eldest among four brothers, shared that he endured numerous challenges and hardships, but finally found the Baity center as one who provided relief to him. Initially he felt uncomfortable but gradually got absorbed wth rest of the class mates. He was given eight psycho social support sessions, three months of non formal education for Maths, English, Arabic and life skills. Similarly, all these children were provide with

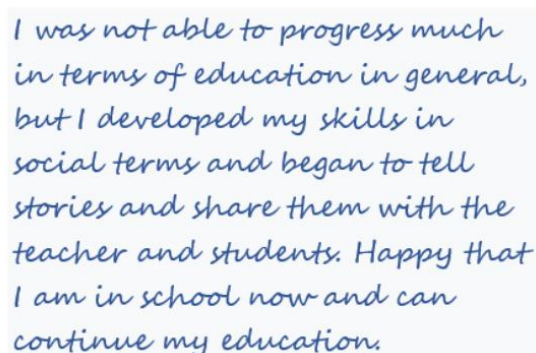
aforementioned support. Psycho social support and life skills education was the backbone of program for these children, given their need for mental health and psycho social support.

For all then children, these sessions focused on topics such as; acceptance of the others, positive thinking / feelings as well as the activities of the friendly space such as interactive and motor games, that resulted in an improvement in their interaction with fellow children and a sense of belonging evolved.

One of the outreach team members expressed that “we found out that he was often bullied because of his weight, and his sensitive personality. The PSS team worked on this note and with time there was more integration and acceptance through many activities and awareness sessions”.

In-depth interviews with outreach team members and teachers from future makers

revealed the following key challenges for getting admission in regular public school for their migrants, which included 1) lack of legal documents or incomplete proof of legal status. 2) Financial barriers – the education in Libya Public school system is free, however transportation, clothes, food and related expenditures that are essential for the studying children. As many children are involved in labor with parents, opportunity cost of freeing up children for study has a financial implication for the families and siblings for access to basic necessities like food. 3) Besides all the tangible challenges, mental health and psychosocial situation of families and children, fear of being caught, and insecurities imprinted on the innocent minds during the tough migration process created a strong hesitation for joining any institute or group of people outside their immediate families and communities.



I was not able to progress much in terms of education in general, but I developed my skills in social terms and began to tell stories and share them with the teacher and students. Happy that I am in school now and can continue my education.

Figure 2. Verbatim from the Migrant Boy Enrolled in School through Baity Center

Discussion

In Libya, the political crisis leading to Qaddafi regime revolt took place in 2011. Long lasting contracted conflicts and humanitarian situation led to the collapse of all the major social sector services. Libya plays a significant role in migration to Europe, serving as both a transit hub and a destination for those fleeing conflict and poverty [10]. In January 2023, IOM DTM reported 706,509 migrants, scattered in 100 municipalities, vast majority in east, especially residing in host communities in Benghazi. Migrants belong from more than 20 countries across Asia, Middle East, Sub-

Saharan Africa, and North Africa. In addition to Migrants and refugees, internal displaced families and returnees are also in a compromised situation due to protracted conflicts leading to political, economic and social instability [11]. In December 2021, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) report presented the data and findings on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees between December 2021, when Baity center project was initiated. DTM Mobility Tracking in Libya reported that number of IDPs within the country continued decreasing, with a parallel increase in the number of returnees. As compared to 661,892 returnees identified in

round 39, the number of those identified during round 40 increased to 673,554 individuals. This indicates a slight increase in the percentage of those returning (2%), accounting for a total increase of 19 per cent since October 2020 ceasefire in Libya [12]. As Benghazi was severely affected in conflicts and vast majority of families from old city of Benghazi fled to the safer areas of Benghazi or other municipalities in east Libya not affected by conflicts. Baity center area also covered a dense population of IDPs in Benghazi and majority of children coming from catchment population were IDPs and returnees, during project. With the passage of time, based on migration trends and IOM tracking system, in January 2024, currently there are 705,746 migrants in the country and constantly increasing due to conflict and crisis in the neighboring countries [13]. For example, recent conflicts in Sudan led to a huge influx of the Sudanese fleeing from their homes and entering neighboring countries to save their families and lives. Tunis and Libya are mostly the first target countries for these Sudanese refugees. According to UNHCR report of 29 January 2024, more than 10,000 Sudanese have entered Libya through Alkufra, a bordering city with Tunis [14].

A Multi Sector Need Assessment (MSNA) was conducted in 2022, to provide an overall cross-sectoral understanding of vulnerabilities among refugees and migrants in Libya. Assessment highlighted their most pressing needs and the severity of needs, both within each sector and from a cross-sector perspective. This also underpinned the specific challenges and needs faced by refugees and asylum seekers, particularly related to Food Security, Shelter, Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), Education, Health, and Protection through living standard gaps among different population. Among all sectors the gap scale was 0-4, 4 being the maximum. Education sector gap and vulnerability of migrant and refugee children was second highest rated at 3, whereas

health gap was the worse [15]. In 2024, same organisation conducted a study on the barriers and enablers for education among migrants and found similar barriers as we observed during Baity center project in Benghazi. These barriers include lack of public transportation. Like Baity center group, according to REACH report, all participants groups highlighted transportation hindering access to education directly by not having taxis or school buses as well as indirectly through financial constraints where parents cannot afford to have personal transport facility. Additionally, fuel scarcity, and limited private transportation options contribute to children's irregular attendance. "Safety and Security Risks" associated with commuting also restricts access. Armed conflicts, pose significant security concerns especially for displaced and non-Libyan groups. Migrants and refugees also face risks of arbitrary arrest or capture at checkpoints [16].

During 2021, OCHA estimated education sector requires 1.7 m for 5 months to target support for 53705 school age children and 2358 teachers. This includes 23908 displaced children and 2205 returnees, 20030 non displaced, 1494 migrants, and 4573 refugee children. Out of all targeted, 8056 were children with disabilities. [17]. Overall figures covered whole Libya. However, Benghazi and many other big cities in east of Libya are growing focus as a settlement point for the refugees who cross border in South or east through Egypt. Recent war in Sudan has shown the same trend for Sudanese refugees. Baity center in Kufra and Benghazi had been able to adjust many of the children from these families. Currently more systematic scale up of this approach is being designed for huge influx of post war Sudanese refugees in Libya.

In such situation, the Civil Society Organisation in Benghazi, Future Maker, who implemented this Operations Research and was capacitated to deliver services to most vulnerable children in integrated manner, were

able to take up the task as UNICEF partner. A Baity center has been established and outreach services team started working in January 2024. Teams are working at community level, referring children to the Baity center or if they have complete documents, then referred to school. Reports show that these refugees are in dire need of support for all services and need a comprehensive package of services. Here, Baity center model is being established as successful again. The need for having more capacitated civil society organizations in Libya is being evidenced by this situation. As these migration trends have been consistent for decades and are expected to continue in future, the model can have a significant impact if adopted in true sense by ministry of social affairs in collaboration with MOH and MOE and continue to scale up in all cities where most vulnerable families are hosted. Restrictive public environment exacerbates the existing low capacity in private sector and civil society organizations to meet the need of vulnerable children or to contribute to their wellbeing, in terms of resource availability as well as capacities. Future maker was selected through a very rigorous, careful, and tedious process as a partner followed by extensive efforts to build their technical, managerial, and financial capabilities.

Based on UNICEF's Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA), 71 per cent of children aged 0–17 years are deprived in two or more dimensions of poverty. About 10 per cent of households engage in child labor as a livelihood coping mechanism.[18] which deprives them from their right to education. The Operations Research project was successful in achieving multiple outcomes and provided evidence that such children can be served and their access to basic rights can be ensured. It focused on developing an integrated services package to support vulnerable children while also raising awareness in communities and enhancing the capacity of Civil Society

Organizations (CSOs) as a national resource. Through this research, which was anchored in actual service delivery through Baity center, the interventional package was proved successful and many dark truths hidden in the suffering communities were revealed through this model, such as severe need for mental health and psycho social support, case management for Gender based violence and child abuse cases, found among vulnerable families.

Appetite in the communities and among migrant families for their children's health and education was translated in to an evidence to advocate for the rights of these vulnerable non-Libyan children, suffering due to restrictive policies of the country. Results showed clearly that services for these children are lacking, and more partners need to pool-in resources and capacities to ensure that all these families and children have access to their basic rights and grow to the best of their potential as productive citizens in the country of their residence.

National capacity – the final way forward!! The involvement of local NGO - Future Maker as a partner was a careful and rigorous selection process, followed by ongoing efforts to build their technical, managerial, and financial capabilities. Additionally, collaboration with Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education and other Government departments in east, was part of the national capacity building efforts.

Literature clearly shows that the formative experiences of immigrant children will be shaped by reciprocal interactions between the child and its environment. The interrelated contexts of development within which children and youth are embedded shape their opportunities and have important implications for both educational and wellbeing outcomes [19].

Keeping the same objective in mind, researcher worked with ministry of social affair, education, and health as counterparts throughout the project and succeeded in scaling

up the model in other municipalities of east as well. This gives an indication for the sustainability of the project. More resources for the continuity of the project have also been promised by the donors, however long-term sustainability is expected through collaborative efforts with social affairs and education sectors in East Libya. Now more than ever, the world's children and young people need global action to invest in health and education, build more resilient systems and services that can reach everyone, and ensure that budget cuts and economic downturns do not harm them [20]. This Operations research revealed the truth that children can be brought out of dust and given a beautiful dawn with a well-designed community-based approach, such as "Baity Center", Arabic version of My Home!

Conclusion

Migration is an extremely intense process, especially illegal migration. Families and children involved in this process are affected by the events for a long time. The absence of legal status of the families poses immense challenges and deprive children of their basic rights.

In such situations, it is crucial that national institutes are strengthened to support these children and ensure their access to basic rights and essential services. This case study of 10 children exemplifies that impossible can be made possible. Future Makers, a local civil society organization, was instrumental in supporting about 700 children and their families for one year project. Their tireless struggle with each child to bring them back to a positive level was commendable. Team encouraged them to learn, enhanced their life skills, provided non-formal education and enabled them to take school examination and finally enrolled in school.

Establishing a multi-sectoral strategic package and building capacity of the local CSOs and institutes to deliver these services was the most vital step. The collaborative approach from government officials, other institutes, and families in addition to financial support from donor resulted in miraculous outcomes. To scale up the model and services package to be delivered to all such families in east of Libya, Ministry of Social Affairs was actively engaged throughout the process. The process of integrating this service delivery approach into ministry's agenda is ongoing and is expected to be scaled up to reach the last child. An effective combination of strategic multisectoral package under one roof and equipped civil society organization, brought children out of dust and raised them to the enlightened dawn. Commitment of Future makers was pivotal in this whole process that contributed to the healthy lives and bright future of these children.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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