

#### **SITE PROFILE REPORT:**

# Azraq, Jordan









#### **Acknowledgements**

This document is a product of the partnership between Arup and the Bernard van Leer Foundation as part of the project "Proximity of Care – Designing for Early Childhood in Vulnerable Urban Context", which saw the collaboration of Civic Action for the work undertaken in Azraq town, Jordan.

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#### **ARUP**

Arup is an independent muti-disciplinary firm with more than 14,000 specialists working across every aspect of today's built environment. Our mission to Shape a Better World is driven by our commitment to make a real difference, stretch the boundaries of what is possible, help our partners solve their most complex challenges and achieve socially valuable outcomes.

The Arup International Development group partners with organisations operating in the humanitarian and development sector, to contribute to safer, more resilient and inclusive communities and urban settings in emerging economies and fragile contexts around the globe.





The Bernard van Leer Foundation is an independent foundation working worldwide to inspire and inform large-scale action to improve the health and well-being of babies, toddlers, and the people who care for them.

The Urban95 Initiative aims to improve, through urban planning, policy, and design, the way babies, toddlers, and the people who care for them live, play, interact with and travel through cities. It asks a bold but simple question:

"If you could experience the city from 95cm - the height of a 3-year-old - what would you change?"

#### + CIVIC

<u>Civic</u> is an international non-governmental organisation that works with leading publicminded institutions and communities in six diverse contexts around the world – from a regeneration area in east London to refugee camps in Jordan – to forge new connections between people, ideas, resources and spaces. Its overriding mission is to establish the 'connective tissues' between the different aspects of community development in a holistic and participatory manner.



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# Executive Summary

Arup and the Bernard van Leer
Foundation have partnered to combine
their design expertise and knowledge
of early childhood development, to
support urban practitioners, city
authorities and development and
humanitarian actors working in
vulnerable urban contexts to design and
build healthy, protective, supportive
and stimulating environments
where young children can thrive.

The Proximity of Care approach was developed to better frame the correlation and interdependencies between the built environment and early childhood development in informal and refugee settlements.

It provides a framework to assess how various urban systems and social factors observable at different levels of the built environment relate to the needs, strengths and challenges facing young children, their caregivers and pregnant women, and ultimately influence early childhood development. The framework is also intended as a tool to support the identification and design of child- and family-friendly interventions in a given urban context, and to measure their the long-term impact.

Proximity of Care is at the core of a Design Guide we are developing for professionals and decisionmakers operating in informal and refugee settlements to profile their work as child- and family-friendly. The Guide incorporates design principles, tools and policy recommendations, to support the assessment, design and





implementation of interventions aiming at improving the conditions and well-being of young children, their caregivers and pregnant women in the environment where they live.

To optimise the Proximity of Care approach and develop a practical and useful Design Guide, Arup and the Bernard van Leer Foundation have partnered with experienced organisations operating in informal and refugee settlements, and piloted our approach in four sites. In El Mina, Lebanon we are working with Catalytic Action; in Azraq, Jordan with Civic; in Kibera, Kenya with Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI); in Khayelitsha, South Africa with Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU).

This report presents insights from the research study undertaken in Azraq, a small town in Zarqa governorate in central-eastern Jordan, in collaboration with CIVIC. The Proximity of Care Appr was used to frame and inform the

research and understand the challenges and opportunities for early childhood development across the city. The report also identifies opportunities for enhancing the living conditions of young children, their caregivers and pregnant women, and for empowering communities through innovative and strategic spatial interventions.



The research identifies core challenges and opportunities for early childhood development at all four dimensions of the Proximity of Care approach.

In relation to **health**, the absence of solid waste or waste water treatment in Azraq threatens to contaminate the built environment and expose caregivers and children to microbial hazards. Trash is left to build up in the streets in some neighbourhoods, while cesspits reportedly leak into the soil, and, possibly, natural water sources. Shortfalls in health services and air quality monitoring compound this. A growing emphasis on good hygiene in both the municipal and school system represents an opportunity to create healthier and more appropriate facilities and services in Azraq for caregivers and young children.

In relation to **protection**, the prevalence of physical violence towards children inside the household is a serious concern for optimal early childhood development. Exacerbating this, there are very few mechanisms for addressing instances of abuse. Less formal support systems, like school

principals, lack legitimacy and some now resist confronting a child's parents through fear of worsening the problem. The work of various nongovernmental organisations that operate to end cycles of violence against children is an important opportunity to create more protective and secure environments for them to learn and play in.

In relation to **stimulation**, there is a considerable lack of accessible or stimulating play space for young children in Azraq. Those areas that do exist have basic facilities or they are considered dangerous because of 'young men' that loiter. Moreover, there are few communal spaces between households in which caregivers or children can congregate and play. This is particularly crucial for those who live in crowded households without access to play aids or space. Various educational approaches, like the Montessori school, demonstrate that caregivers are supportive of their children experiencing an informative and playful environment. Similarly, the presence of unused government land represents an opportunity to establish inclusive and stimulating play spaces



in which both caregiver and child can interact with their peers and the environment around them.

In relation to **support**, the distinct needs of children and women are often excluded from decision-making processes in Azraq, owing to the dominance of men on the municipal board. This is expressed in relation to the shortage of fulfilling or remunerative employment opportunities for female caregivers, as well as an absence of safe spaces in which women can congregate and socialise. Interventions by organisations such as CARE International and Civic offer opportunities for caregivers' professional development, and to generate an income while developing their skillset. As does the development division in the municipality, which offers an entry point for mainstreaming childfriendliness in physical restructuring processes.

This report includes key recommendations for enhancing early childhood development opportunities in Azraq town.

# 1. Introduction



# ARUP AND THE BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIP

Vulnerable urban areas such as refugee and informal settlements house a growing population in critical need, and the number and size of these areas will only increase in the coming decades. While the specifics of these vulnerable areas vary, they consistently pose major challenges for children's optimal development. Living in these contexts has particularly significant negative impacts on young children aged 0 to 5.2

At present, the specific needs, vulnerabilities and demands of young children, their caregivers and pregnant women living in informal and refugee settlements are frequently ill-considered and unaccounted by government, development and humanitarian organisations, and urban practitioners. The 0-5 age group's needs are different than those of older children, but are often 'lumped in' with them from a planning and policy perspective, or worse, go entirely unrecognised.

Arup and the Bernard van Leer
Foundation have partnered to help
bridge this gap, by combining their
design expertise and knowledge of early
childhood development. The Proximity
of Care approach was developed to
better understand the needs and
constraints faced by young children,
their caregivers, and pregnant women
in vulnerable urban contexts, such
as informal and refugee settlements;
and to ultimately help improve their
living conditions and well-being.

The Proximity of Care approach is at the core of a Design Guide that we are developing to help urban practitioners, city authorities and development and humanitarian actors working in vulnerable urban contexts, mainstream in their projects child- and family-friendly design principles, processes and policy recommendations.

The Design Guide is intended to provide practical tools to enable users to thoroughly assess and design interventions in informal and refugee settlements, whilst considering the needs and demands of young children, their caregivers and pregnant women, to ultimately build healthy, protective, supportive and stimulating environments where young children can thrive.

The Guide builds upon the Bernard van Leer Foundation's Urban95 Initiative, which asks a bold but simple question: "If you could experience the city from 95cm – the height of a 3-year-old – what would you change?". Urban95 leverages urban planning, policy and design to improve the very youngest children and their caregivers experience, play in, interact with and travel through cities.

To ensure the needs of the Design Guide's end users are properly met, we are working closely with urban practitioners operating in informal and refugee settlements, and with development and humanitarian organisations. In particular, we are partnering with Civic, Catalytic Action, Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU), who are operating in vulnerable urban contexts in various sites across Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, and South Africa respectively.

# WHY AN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FOCUS IN VULNERABLE URBAN CONTEXTS

The early years of a child's life are crucial for healthy physical and mental development<sup>3</sup>. Neuroscience research demonstrates that a child's experiences with family, caregivers and their environment provides the foundation for lifelong learning and behaviour<sup>4</sup>.

Cognitive evolution from birth to age five is a 'golden period' during which the stage is set for all future development, including core skills acquisition, establishment of healthy attitudes and behaviours, and flourishing of mature relationships<sup>5</sup>. Without effective early childhood support, developmental deficits can become a cycle of lost human capital. Developmental

inhibition in the first two years of life has harmful effects on adult performance, including lower educational attainment and reduced earning<sup>6</sup>. Improving early childhood development, on the other hand, acts as a social and economic engine for communities and societies.

To develop to their full potential, babies and toddlers require not only the minimum basics of good nutrition and healthcare, clean air and water and a safe environment; they also need plenty of opportunities to explore, to play, and to experience warm, responsive human interactions<sup>7</sup>. To a large degree, the establishment of healthy patterns in human relationships depends upon the physical environment children inhabit in their very first years<sup>8</sup>.

The characteristics of physical space impact learning and memory formation<sup>9</sup>; chronic noise exposure can result in lower cognitive functioning and unresponsive parenting<sup>10</sup>; crowding can elevate physiological stress in parents and cause aggressive behaviour in young children. For young children to make the most of their surrounding built environment, those places need to cater to age-relevant developmental needs, while providing affordances and barrier-free access for caregivers<sup>11</sup>.

Children, caregivers and expectant mothers living in rapidly urbanising informal and refugee contexts are a particularly vulnerable population, among the most severely affected by a lack of basic services, inadequate living conditions, and limited opportunities for individual and community growth. In addition, these populations are often on the front line of climate change impacts, compounding the difficulty of their situation.



While the typologies of vulnerable urban contexts can vary, living in these environments is consistently demonstrated to have significant negative impacts on the optimal development of very young children, as well as their support networks<sup>12</sup>.

With cities growing exponentially and population displacement on the rise globally, more and more children are likely to find themselves living in informal, resource-restricted, and otherwise vulnerable urban areas. In the coming decades, children's health, lives and futures will be increasingly determined by the shape of cities and urban settlements.

Investing in early childhood development has been proven to be the single most effective method for poor and vulnerable societies to break out of poverty and vulnerability cycles<sup>13</sup>. For urban planners, development actors, and government authorities alike, there is no greater chance to reap long-term, society-wide benefits than by improving early childhood development for the generations being raised in vulnerable urban contexts around the globe.



# THE PROXIMITY OF CARE APPROACH

The Proximity of Care Approach was developed to better understand the relationship between the built environment and early childhood development in vulnerable urban contexts, whose interdependencies are not always fully appreciated and addressed.

It is a tool that provides a structured, granular and holistic approach to assess how various urban systems relate to a child's developmental needs in a given context; and to help support, prioritise and design child- and family friendly interventions. The framework is also intended as a tool for ongoing outcome assessment, to measure the long-term impact of specific interventions.

The Approach considers **four primary Dimensions** foundational to optimal early childhood development: **Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support**. Each dimension is assessed against a range of key factor areas, which are both hard and soft assets – physical space and infrastructure, human interactions and behaviours, economic, policy and planning elements, that individually and collectively contribute to enable optimal early childhood development in a given urban context.

To gain a holistic understanding of the needs and demands of young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women in their settlement, these factor areas are assessed at different urban scales of human interactions— the Household, Neighbourhood and City levels, whose boundaries are highly context-dependent.

#### **Dimension: Health**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a healthy and enriching environment for optimal early childhood development, examining how to improve physical, mental, and emotional health and support cognitive development among young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women.

#### **Dimension: Protection**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a safe and secure environment for optimal early childhood development, determining how to reduce risks, mitigate hazards and increase safety for children, and improve caregivers' perception and experience of safety and security.

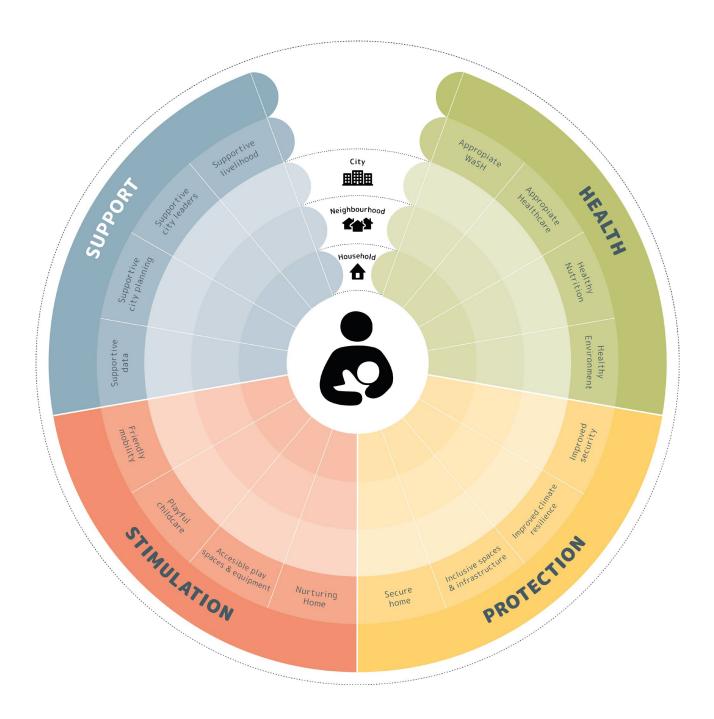
#### **Dimension: Stimulation**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a nurturing and stimulating environment for optimal early childhood development, addressing how to enhance the quality of children's interaction with caregivers, peers, other adults, and the physical space around them.

#### **Dimension: Support**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a knowledgeable and supportive environment for optimal early childhood development, looking at how to enhance knowledge, support from city authorities and community members, and include beneficiaries' voices in decision-making and planning.





This cross-cutting assessment allows a nuanced understanding of the specific areas most critical to improving early childhood development in a given context. The knowledge and evidence generated through the application of the framework can be used to

support planners, authorities and built environment professionals to create a healthy, stimulating, safe and supportive environment that contributes to young children's optimal development, and enhances caregivers' and pregnant women's living conditions and wellbeing.

#### THE TOOLKIT

The application of the Proximity of Care Approach is supported by a toolkit for conducting a participatory assessment. The toolkit includes methods and tools for the following activities:

**Desk-based Analysis** of secondary socio-economic and spatial data on the selected neighbourhood.

**Transect Walks** to map and assess site materiality and accessibility, social conditions, availability and conditions of child-friendly spaces, child-friendliness and child-specific hazards manifested by local infrastructure, pedestrian and vehicular traffic flows, and potential barriers to play access.

**Key Informant Interviews** with different stakeholders including academic experts, built environment professionals, NGO staff, city authorities, youth groups, educators and community leaders to better understand early childhood challenges and opportunities in the selected neighbourhood.

**Focus Group Discussions** with children, educators, and community members to examine local opportunities and challenges surrounding early childhood development.

Assessment Workshops with children (0-5 and 6-12), caregivers, local educators, community leaders and community members to map and understand early childhood challenges and opportunities in the selected neighbourhood, experienced by children and carers in the local community.

**Co-creation Workshops** with children (0-5 and 6-12), caregivers, local educators, and community members to identify early childhood development opportunities in the selected neighbourhood, and come up with tangible ideas for intervention in key hot-spots, using participatory solution development exercises.





# 2.Azraq, ZarqaProfile



#### **METHODOLOGY**

The Proximity of Care Approach was used in Azraq, a small town in centraleastern Jordan, to understand the challenges and opportunities for early childhood development across the town, and identify opportunities for enhancing the living conditions of young children, their caregivers and pregnant women. The field research was conducted in collaboration with CIVIC and took into account the overall Azraq territory.

The field research enabled Arup and the Bernard van Leer Foundation to field test and refine the Proximity of Care Approach and associated toolkit, and to establish a baseline for site conditions, including challenges and opportunities, to inform the design of context-sensitive interventions.

The following methods were used in the elaboration of the research and production of the report:

- Desk based review and gap analysis of secondary demographic, geographic, and census data, complemented by CIVIC's internal records and experience working in this setting.
- Stakeholder mapping to develop a database of key local stakeholders, sorted by specialisation and mapped against the Proximity of Care Dimensions and Goals, to engage for research activities including interviews, focus groups, and workshops.
- Semi-structured interviews (12) with representatives from international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs), local health providers, neighourhoods and schools, as well as caregivers and pregnant women. Of the caregivers and pregnant women, the majority were Syrian, and, whilst it

is not clear exactly when they migrated to Jordan, it is likely that they arrived at some point within the past decade.

Due to movement and proximity restrictions required by the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, some research activities were performed remotely. An envisioned workshop with children and caregivers was scoped out due to the government mandated social distance guidelines introduced during the project period.

The Azraq Site Profile Report is structured around the four Dimensions of the Proximity of Care Framework – Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support, with an introductory section presenting a general overview of the site, with geographic, demographic and socio-economic conditions.

Key challenges and opportunities to early childhood development are assessed for each Dimension at different urban scales – the Household, Neighbourhood and City levels. Recommendations on type of interventions to be implemented in the neighbourhood to address these challenges and enhance these opportunities are provided.

#### **OVERVIEW**

Azraq is a small town in Zarqa governorate in central-eastern Jordan, 100km east of the capital, Amman. Its territory includes Southern Azraq, Al Omary, Al Ein Al Bayda, Al Mazara's, Um Al Masayel, Al Daghilah and Al Qaeda. Azraq represents the eastern gate of Jordan, connecting the country with the Arab Gulf States and Iraq. It is the largest land crossing in Jordan, with four million people crossing every year.

The Azraq Oasis is a historically significant settlement in an arid and remote landscape. It is the only permanent source of fresh water in 12,000km² of desert and lies parallel to an ancient trading route. Increasingly over time, the water has been pumped for agricultural and urban purposes to match the growing population, particularly in Amman. By 1992, the Oasis had dried entirely, severing many people's livelihoods and increasing the incidence of poverty.

In 2014, the Azraq Refugee Camp was established to house refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war. The camp is coordinated and run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and has attracted considerable nongovernmental organisation (NGO) presence and support. By March 2016, two years after opening, the camp held 32,000 refugees. By March 2018, this number had climbed to more than 36,000. The camp is well-served by water and other basic services, and NGOs provide medical and health facilities. It is located approximately 27km (35 minutes by car) from Azraq town; it is important not to conflate the two.

Notwithstanding the camp, Azraq town hosts a significant number of refugees. The town was one of five areas where CARE International established

its urban Community Centres in 2010 to respond to high concentrations of urban Syrian refugees outside of designated camps<sup>14</sup>. And in September 2020, almost half (49.9%) of UNHCR's Total Persons of Concern in Zarqa governorate (which includes Azraq town) did not live in Azraq camp, but lived in Jordanian host communities instead<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Administrative Boundary**

In 2015 Azraq district was the second largest district in Zarqa governorate, with a land mass of 3,948km². It sits at the heart of the transboundary, renewable groundwater basin in the northern part of the Eastern Desert of Jordan¹6. Azraq is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and southeast, Mafraq governorate to the north and northeast, and Zarqa to the west.

While a strategic urban development plan was prepared by the Ministry of Municipalities for the years 2007-2012, this was not implemented. Similarly, in 2009 a data collection process was launched by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for an Azraq masterplan, but this also failed to materialise.

#### **Demography**

Despite Azraq's population growing in the past two decades, population density has remained low. In 2014, the population was approximately 11,730 with an average density of three persons per square kilometre.

More recent statistics put Azraq's population at 15,658, almost 2% of Al-Zarqa governorate's total population (792,665). By comparison, the Azraq Refugee Camp has a far larger density and its population increased 151% between 2015 and 2016. The latest UNHCR fact sheet



estimates that 22% of refugees from Syria are younger than five years of age and 61% are 'children'. In 2014, Azraq's population was split 55% male to 45% female, and 80% of the entire population were younger than forty years of age.

#### **Socio-Economic Conditions**

In 2012, average household income in Azraq was JOD 5,713 (ca. US\$8) per family of 4.8 people per year<sup>17</sup>. Household expenditure was more than two-thousand Jordanian dollars higher, at JOD 7,791. In the same year, the poverty rate was 14.1%, marginally lower than the national average of 14.4%. Female unemployment was more than double that of men at 18.6% and 9.2%, respectively. Female unemployment was also 50% higher than the national average of 12%.

The largest employers in Azraq are agriculture, government, small industry and tourism. Arable land in 2016 encompassed approximately 290,000 dunams<sup>18</sup>, 27% of which was shared among 680 farms. Product includes field crops, plam treets, fruit and vegetables as well as cattle, goats, poultry and sheep.

Despite the presence of large salt reserves, industry is small and limited mostly to plants, small factories and workshops, in addition to a Halawah factory<sup>19</sup>, tailor shops, construction plants and brick plants. In the municipality, less than 6% of staff were educated to undergraduate level, suggesting that educational attainment is not a prominent barrier to formal job opportunities. Some stakeholders consider this to be a constraint on economic development.

# 3. Key Challenges

This section outlines key challeges identified in Azraq, using the Proximity of Care Approach. Opportunities and recommendations on type of interventions to be implemented in the neighbourhood to address the challenges identified within the Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support Dimension are provided in Section 4.



#### HEALTH CHALLENGES

The Health Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to a healthy and enriching environment for optimal early childhood development, examining how to improve physical, mental, and emotional health, and support cognitive development among young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women.



#### Household level

For those living in southern Azraq, military aircraft generate a large amount of noise. One interviewee explained that before the coronavirus lockdown, the sound of military planes flying overheard was loud enough to make the phone line inaudible, and that "the airport never stops"<sup>20</sup>. Continued exposure to loud noise can disrupt both a caregiver and child's sleep pattern, increase levels of stress hormones, and, even, affect the academic performance of children<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, living in close proximity to an airport exposes both adults and children over time to pollutants like carbon monoxide.

Household waste is deposited in "barrels"<sup>22</sup> outside each household; one respondent recalls their neighbour burning waste and emitting fumes into neighbouring households. In southern Azraq, the organisation responsible no longer collects this rubbish, making caregivers and children vulnerable to inhaling harmful toxins or contracting germs should the rubbish be left to build up.

While the water quality in Azraq is reportedly decent as compared with elsewhere in Jordan, some interviewees discussed growing problems with it. The majority of lakes within close proximity to the town have dried up. What remains is unhealthy, according to some: one interviewee explains that she began using filtered water inside her household because she suffered from the "residue" within the main water supply. Furthermore, "a lot of people are running out of water", and sudden cut offs are common. This leaves some residents having to wait until the evening to wash or to run other errands.



#### **Neigbourhood level**

There are no public toilets in Azraq. An absence of public sanitatary facilities can marginalise certain children from the public realm (particularly those with continence issues) and disrupt the daily lives of caregivers and families. Furthermore, "bad"<sup>23</sup> or inaccessible sanitary facilities in some schools can interrupt learning and subject children to painful health repurcussions should they need to stool-hold for extended periods of time.

In some neighbourhoods, "trash is everywhere" and this degrades the available spaces in which children play. The likelihood that young children crawl along the ground and play in the predominantly sand-based streets will expose them to chemicals and dust that have accumulated and contaminated the built environment. This puts the youngest children especially at risk of environmental toxicants and potentially irreversible side effects on their central nervous, digestive, immune and reproductive development.

The lack of a wastewater treatment system "is one of the main and most obvious issues" for households in Azraq town. There are no sewage lines, leaving many neighbourhoods dependent upon cesspit tanks and absorption pits. The cesspits reportedly lead into the surrounding soil, and, possibly, water sources, threatening contamination. Furthermore, one respondent claimed that school water supplies come directly from the reserve, which is made of iron and naturally rusts over time.



#### City level

Existing health centres – of which there are two – are under-capacitated and without fundamental equipment for even the most basic of treatments. The nearest birth facilities are at the Zarqa hospital, which is a one-hour drive from Azraq. While the parademics are "competent and fast"<sup>24</sup>, accounts of women giving birth en route to the hospital and newborns being permanently handicapped because they did not receive a sufficient supply of oxygen, illustrate how dangerous this is. Furthermore, "there is not enough capabilities to support pregnant women, and you know how important this is"<sup>25</sup>.

The limited capacity of public health facilities leads some respondents to visit private doctors. These reportedly prescribe expensive medication and they may only be available once per week. These doctors' erratic schedule was made clear by one respondent, who explained, "if he is awake, he gives you medicine; if he is not awake, you are finished"<sup>26</sup>. While appointments are "not very expensive"<sup>27</sup> – usually 10 dinars (US\$14) – the medicine is sourced internationally, raising prices and forcing caregivers to spend limited disposable income on basic medication.

There is no supervisory body for air quality in Azraq: "environmental supervision is almost non-existent in Al-Azraq"<sup>28</sup>. This is critical considering Azraq's proximity to the military air base and its exposure to carbon monoxide fumes. Furthermore, "the weather is always dusty"<sup>29</sup>, and it may carry harmful pollutants that increase the risk of respiratory illnesses in young children and elderly caregivers.

# PROTECTION CHALLENGES

The Protection Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to a safe and secure environment for optimal early childhood development, determining how to reduce risks, mitigate hazards and increase safety for children, and improve caregivers' perception and experience of safety and security.



#### Household level

One interviewee worries that mothers in her neighbourhood frequently beat their children on the basis that this is "normal" and that it is an important element of their maturation. Exposure to abuse from a young age can breed isolation and fear and trigger lifelong psychological difficulties that impede a child's educational attainment and self-esteem. In fact, children in Azraq that experience domestic violence reportedly "go outside and be extremely savage", taking their frustration out on other children and creating cycles of aggression and violence.

While non-state actors lead 'awareness' sessions to redress these abusive beliefs, there is no formally-embedded or recognised protection mechanism for child victims of domestic violence in Azraq.

One interviewee explained how the Southern Azraq School used to attempt to communicate with parents of violent children. However, this often resulted in the child's father "treating the child with violence" and punishing them in front of the teachers. Crucially, the school no longer tries to engage parents on their child's behaviour for this reason. Ultimately, a lack of recognised protection initiatives leaves schools with little authority in addressing domestic abuse: "because we are talking to the students personally and not as part of an organised and supported initiative, we could not intervene to the extent that is necessary" 33.

Informal mechanisms for combating or reporting domestic violence are limited, too. Where violent children attack their peers, mothers in Azraq are reluctant to raise this issue with that child's parents because "the reaction would be bad" or because "they never cared"<sup>34</sup>. This can fuel cycles of violence while making it unlikely that any measure will be put in place to address abusive tendencies among certain children.



#### **Neigbourhood level**

#### Reports of "young guys"<sup>35</sup> and sexual violence in the park in southern Azraq deters many parents from sending their children there.

Rather, they have their children play within close proximity to the home, where, despite the presence of sandy and spacious areas, child-friendly and green facilities are lacking. Crucially, this park is one of few family-oriented recreational sites in southern Azraq, and its occupation by young men therefore dispossesses caregivers and children of an important play space. This is compounded by an absence of municipal supervision, which leaves few opportunities for enhancing security.

There is a general scepticism in Azraq toward "newcomers"<sup>36</sup>, who respondents do not trust their children around. For example, one respondent explains that it is unsafe for children to visit the washrooms in the Mosque alone, especially at night when "there are many strangers around from different nationalities and backgrounds"<sup>37</sup>.

It is likely in this case that "strangers" of "different nationalities" are Syrian migrants who have moved to Azraq but do not reside in the Azraq refugee camp. "Strangers" also includes the large number of international truck drivers who visit the Azraq mosque to use its toilet facilities.

Young children in southern Azraq fight among one another. In reflecting upon how frequently this happens, one respondent said, "it is sad that kids have such a mindset"38. Notably, this is usually an issue between younger children, rather than between younger and older children. One respondent is faced with deciding whether to force her child to stay home, where he will play on the phone and experience minimal interaction and stimulation, or whether to let him go outside and face being "beaten"39. As well as physical violence, there are concerns regarding sexual activity and harassment among older children<sup>40</sup>.



#### **City level**

A lack of pedestrianised walkways along the main road puts schoolchildren at considerable risk: "the main road is scary, you cannot feel safe to have your kid there"41. A non-governmental organisation installed a passageway, but this soon deteriorated. The Ministry of Public Works has been consulted, but they lack the necessary machinery to retrofit Azrag's roadsides. The main road also becomes a barrier to independent mobility and to younger children accessing public parks, as one interviewee stated: "not any kid can cross that road and go to the park unless parents are together \*42. There is just one traffic light and cars seldom stop to allow children to cross the road. Thus, if their parents are unable to accompany them, the youngest children are deprived of high-value play experiences beyond the immediate bounds of their neighbourhood.

Several areas of Azraq are prone to flooding during the rainy season. Al Tatweer is one example. The municipality's Social Development Office, which is responsible for 'social disasters', "is unable" according to one respondent<sup>43</sup>. Syrian migrants that reside illegally on farmlands in Azraq are forced to move during rainy periods; it appears that the municipality is doing nothing to aid or support these individuals. Furthermore, climate change adaptation is neither a community nor municipal priority, especially for non-farming families. In result, there are no emergency shelters; some school buildings are in need of reconstruction and these will likely be vulnerable to future hazards.

# STIMULATION CHALLENGES

The Stimulation Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to a nurturing and stimulating environment for optimal early childhood development, addressing how to enhance the quality of children's interaction with caregivers, peers, other adults, and the physical space around them.



#### Household level

While the schools encourage children to "play with games that stimulate their brains" many households do not have the required games or tools to make this happen. In this case, a child's learning or play experience inside the household is extremely limited, particularly in overcrowded dwellings where space for independent exploration and play is also lacking.

High illiteracy rates among parents could be a barrier to creating more stimulating environments for children inside the household.

In many cases, it is older siblings who take on the responsibility of tutoring their siblings, or simply reading them stories: "my daughter brings stories from the library and reads for her brother" While not discussed in interviews, there is a possibility that these older siblings are not always available to do this because of schooling, socialising or work. In this case, some children might go without sustained learning or stimulation at home.

Between households, there are no communal spaces for gathering or socialising, confining people's social experience to their (usually) small houses or in the street. While Azraq Alive built a park, this was in front of the mosque, which now uses the play space for prayers. Furthermore, there is no fence nor security of any kind around this park. An absence of communal spaces between households may discourage social interaction and simply reduce these areas to transit corridors. Together with dangerous roads and unsafe public parks, this again limits a child's play experience to the confines of their immediate surroundings at home.



#### **Neigbourhood level**

Several respondents criticise the lack of child-friendly play spaces in Azraq. Furthermore, those spaces that do exist either have basic recreational facilities or they are not suited to children under 5-years old, who instead will play on mobile phones and share minimal interaction with their peers. This denies children the opportunity for collaborative and explorative play whereby they can learn from other children and individuals in their play ecosystem. According to one respondent, this is akin to oppression: "the Azraq kids are oppressed, they have no places to play sports or do their hobbies" 16.

In some schools, opportunities for active stimulation and play are limited. The Ein Albeida school in northern Azraq has a paved playground: while this may mean it is cleaner or smoother, one interviewee said that it is "dangerous" for children<sup>47</sup>. The school also lacks a library for children to sit and read in, so other activities are scarce. In the Southern Azrag school, designated spaces that tailor to the distinct needs of different age groups are unavailable. One of the staff emphasised that "this is needed and should be implemented"48. Furthermore, the available 'fields' are filled with "rubble" and "remains of a construction site", meaning that "if a child falls while playing in those fields, it may result in some serious injuries" 9.

In the Southern Azraq school, Jordanian children are taught in the morning 'shift' and Syrian children in the afternoon shift. There is no caretaker to manage the building, and so "each teacher is responsible for her room and wouldn't give the keys to anyone else"<sup>50</sup>. In result, the teachers who work the morning shift reportedly lock the classrooms, "so the afternoon teachers cannot work"<sup>51</sup>. This disproportionately affects the learning of Syrian children, whose classes take place in the afternoon.



#### City level

Building more stimulating, child-friendly space in Azraq is challenging as some craftsmen do not have the requisite experience or the appropriate tools. Where they have no machines to bend metal, for example, the swing will not look "as intended" and it may therefore be difficult to use.

In southern Azraq, formal kindergartens are limited in number. This leaves **few opportunities for young children to attend quality childcare facilities, deepening the care burden on caregivers, the majority of whom are women.** 

To fill the formal care vacuum, "home nurseries"<sup>53</sup> have been established by households in certain neighbourhoods. These nurseries are not registered and some respondents question their ability to provide sufficient childcare. This compounds the sense of disorientation and some respondents feel when they have nowhere to leave their children during the day.

For some respondents, access to commercial services that they and their children can visit "is a struggle"54. In Prine Hamza neighbourhood, for instance, there is no grocery store for between 3-4,000 residents and the nearest market is more than two kilometres away. The markets in the north and the south are seven kilometres apart and both sell different products that families **require.** For elderly caregivers, it can take one hour to walk to the other end of Azraq to find a suitable store. An absence of benches and street furniture means there is little rest space. In addition, one respondent claimed that while "everything is available", certain food products such as vegetables are "more expensive here"55 than in Zarqa or in Syria, where she and her children moved from.

# SUPPORT CHALLENGES

The Support Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to a knowledgeable and supportive environment for optimal early childhood development, looking at how to enhance knowledge, support from city authorities and community members, and include beneficiaries' voices in decisionmaking and planning.



#### Household level

#### The care burden for young children in Azraq town usually falls on women and older siblings.

As one interviewee explained, "the Covid-19 crisis is the only time fathers had time to share the responsibility towards their kids"56. The burden of unpaid care duties, together with the absence of well-paid employment opportunities in Azraq town (discussed at the City level, below), suggests that these caregivers have limited opportunities for professional development. In the most severe cases, limited employment opportunities for young adults pushes some into drug abuse because "they don't have anything to be benefited by in their lives"57. For others, caregiving duties may isolate older siblings from friendship networks as they are unable to engage in certain activities. For instance, one interviewee claimed that caregivers in Azraq must plan their social outings based on activities that the children can participate in.



#### **Neigbourhood level**

The benefits of child-friendly initiatives in Azraq's neighbourhoods have been limited by the inability and/or reluctance of young people to participate. While many communities are connected and supportive of one another, an interviewee explains that children and youths are treated as if they are too young to make decisions or to change their behaviours. This stems from patriarchal attitudes, whereby caregivers and other influential figures - especially men - frequently make decisions on their children's behalf. In result, children grow up without the ability or confidence to pursue their interests. This might be compounded by the fact that everyone in Azraq knows one another and is "connected"58 in some way, and young people therefore fear being judged should they do something wrong.

Another factor that has limited the benefits of child-friendly initiatives in Azraq is unsustainable interventions. Interventions with a child component have failed to stimulate long-term benefits and change. In result, people in Azraq have become discouraged and they usually forget about the intervention and what it sought to achieve. This is particularly the case for municipal interventions. These have severed trust between young people in Azraq and municipal officials because they were based upon lots of promises but very little action. Older children no longer attend municipal training or workshops for this reason.

Azraq is considered a "closed community" in which change has to stem first from the community itself, before it can be implemented. For this reason, **initiatives or projects that are seen as foreign to Azraq's background or culture will be rejected.** This may have implications for interventions or projects that address previously ill-considered problems, such as equal treatment between genders or nationalities. The difficulty here was expressed by one interviewee: "you know in closed communities, if they don't request something, it is hard to impose something new on them"<sup>59</sup>.



#### **City level**

Fulfilling and remunerative employment opportunities for young adults in Azraq are in short supply, especially in the northern part of the town. For those that travel to Al Zarqa for work, the majority of their payslip will be spent on transportation. Unless one wants to become a military officer or join law enforcement, therefore, they are left with no option other than to depend on their father for financial support. For those young adults - especially older brothers - who act as caregivers for their younger siblings, limited disposable income may mean that they cannot afford nutritious foods or play aids for the children in their care, as these accessories must compete with basic household necessities like electricity, medication, water or generic foodstuffs.

#### Children and women are excluded almost entirely from political decision-making in Azraq.

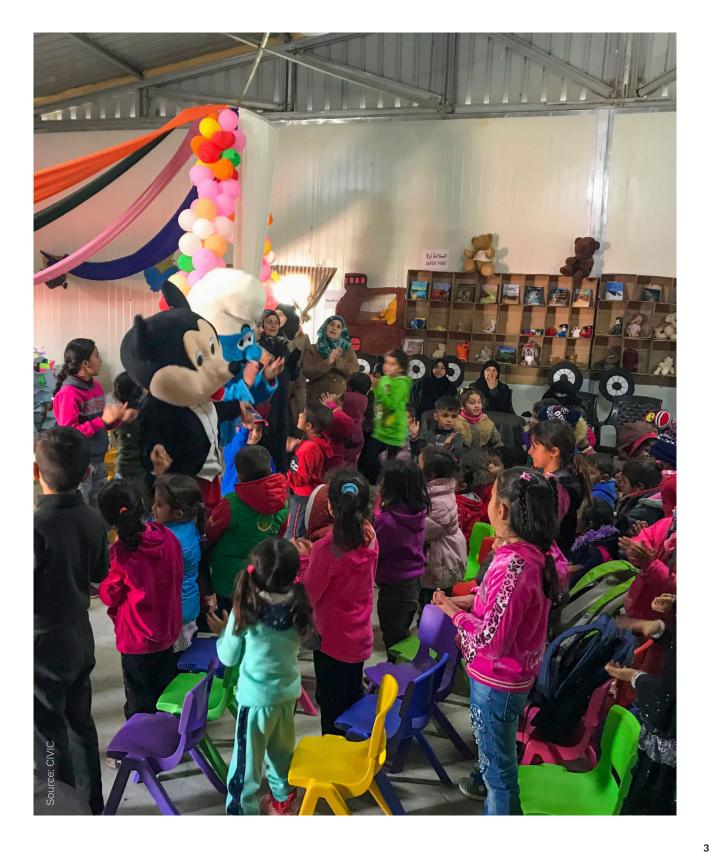
The majority of the municipal board are men, whose voices reportedly exert more influence than those of female members. Where the voices of children and women are considered, this is "only when they want us to vote for them" according to one respondent. What this means is that **the** 

experiences and perspectives of caregivers – and, naturally, the children they care for

- do not sit front-and-centre of municipal

**planning.** This might lend explanation for the lack of child-friendly spaces in many neighbourhoods, as opportunities to express the need for such spaces are rare. Limited representation of caregivers also obscures the specific challenges relating to their caregiving obligations, and may fuel a sense of helplessness and isolation in cases where their livelihoods are strained.

Women in Azrag have no "safe place" for gathering, such as public spaces or even restaurants, as most are either maledominanted or they are family spaces. They therefore tend to visit each other inside their households, or, in some cases, at certain community centers were trainings are held (see Opportunities section, below). Either way, some women go without enjoyable spaces that they can share with their children or friends. One respondent underlined this: "I like to go out and walk, but I don't find the right place to walk. I either have to go to the far reserve or I have to go to the farms"61. The respondent requested that a gym be built for children and their mothers: "some women say that they wish we had a gym. They would play and take their kids".



# 4. Opportunities

The application of the Proximity of Care Approach has enabled a diverse set opportunities to be identified in Azraq across the Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support dimensions, and at different urban scales – the Household, Neighbourhood and City levels.



# HEALTH OPPORTUNITIES

Exposure of both caregiver and child to waste and pollutants is a lingering health challenge that can have lasting and, sometimes, undetectable repurcussions, especially for the youngest children. Creating a more effective urban waste system in Azraq – in turn protecting the local environment and possibly creating jobs – can build cohesion and responsibility, while increasing constituents' active participation in the spaces around them.

There is a growing emphasis on clean waste management at the city level. Leveraging this and coordinating with non-governmental organisations, like Action Against Hunger and Majlisna, can offer a promising entry point to creating a healthier environment in Azraq for caregivers and children. Similarly, installing multi-use services that double up as health and sanitary facilities could address (1) the existing shortfalls in the two health centres, and (2) the absence of public sanitatary sites in Azraq.



#### Household level

While there are no public toilets in Azraq, equipped facilities in the majority of households ensure that caregivers and their children have access to a safe toilet. A household toilet may create a heightened sense of responsibility for cleaning and maintaining it, as compared with a communal toilet shared by several households. This in turn may lessen the chance that faeces and germs will be present and remain active on the skin. A toilet in the home also means that caregivers or children need not go outside and expose themselves, particularly at night when "strangers" and "stray dogs" pose a safety risk.



Hygiene is embedded in the school curriculum in both northern and southern Azraq. Before the coronavirus pandemic, one school in southern Azraq partnered with a WASH organisation that taught tutors how to educate their students and raise awareness of hygienic practices. The school uses visual aids like graffiti to communicate the importance of hand washing to young children. At one school in northern Azraq, teachers provide disinfectants and soap to their students, as well as teaching them about the importance of personal hygiene. Together with 'health centres' that occasionally present lectures on personal hygiene and related issues, there is an opportunity to further mainstream good hygienic practice in Azraq, particularly among young children.



#### **City level**

There is growing attention to cleaner waste management in Azraq. More specifically, actors responsible for waste are prioritising cleaninless as "an essential subject"; some organisations even invite residents to collect waste and inform them of the benefits of responsible disposal<sup>64</sup>. The council is currently exploring the use of organic fertilisers. Furthermore, two organisations, ACF and Majlisna, lead a municipal project that teaches people how to recycle. This is supported by the 2017 environmental laws that allow the Ministry of Environment to fine the municipality in cases of poor waste disposal practices.



## PROTECTION OPPORTUNITIES

A network of child-friendly physical spaces could increase both experiences and perceptions of safety for people in Azraq. Designated play space that is spacious and well-lit would address the fear that some feel in the existing parks. More specifically, open space could deter 'young men' from loitering and increase communal surveillance whereby caregivers could feel safe in the knowledge that their child is within the sightliness of numerous people at any given time.

Being able to visit more secure spaces might also increase the likelihood that caregivers spend less time inside their household, where they are prone to frustration and stress. Safer walkways along the main road will also relieve caregivers of fears for their children's safety when walking to school. Furthermore, this will open more secure access to the play space that some families must currently navigate the busy and dangerous main road to access. Ultimately, combining physical interventions with ongoing NGO initiatives to protect children from domestic violence will contribute to a more secure environment for both caregivers and young children in Azraq.



#### **Household level**

There is reference to some "informal" and community-based organisations that protect children and women from abuse inside the home. In the past, the municipality has operated through the Azraq Ladies Committee in southern Azraq, and Irfan in northern Azraq, to prevent abused children from becoming aggressive themselves. This suggests that there is an opportunity to advocate for and mainstream violence prevention in Azraq, provided these organisations can be supported.

Furthermore, one respondent from southern Azraq mentioned Care International and the Makani centre – a subsidiary of UNICEF – as support systems that can combat domestic violence against Syrian children in particular.



### Certain schools have set important precedents for identifying and reducing child abuse.

Staff at the school in Azraq act as a protection mechanism for children. Some submit weekly reports to the principal and their offices are located such that they offer a private space for pupils to visit. Furthermore, teachers at the southern Azraq school informally discuss the importance of reporting abuse with "girls approaching their adolescent phase"66. School-led approaches supplement similar programmes in Azraq – like the 'Syrian Fund' – that aim to defend children and other vulnerable individuals from domestic violence. Scaling these mechanisms and connecting them with municipal authorities could mainstream protection in the municipality.



#### **City level**

Azraq's military background creates a heightened sense of security as compared with elsewhere in Jordan. This is reinforced by LED street lamps that the municipality have installed; improved lighting has minimised opportunities for criminal behaviour, leading one respondent to say that "the streets are safe and well lit"67. More street lighting between neighbourhoods is required, however, to "increase the safety"68 of persons visiting family or friends who live elsewhere in the town.



## STIMULATION OPPORTUNITIES

A built environment interspersed with play space will benefit children in Azraq, whose cognitive and emotional development is constrained by inappropriate or unsafe spaces and little opportunity for stimulating learning and play. Creating a network of high-value space, for example, enables caregivers to accompany their children to more stimulating space beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Installing accessible and rest-oriented space (such as benches and platforms) will benefit other demographic groups, especially elderly persons who must traverse the town to purchase specific food items.

If government land is indeed available for development, more stimulating physical spaces can enhance this and support the municipality's objective to stimulate tourist flows and build upon the attraction of the Azraq Wetland Reserve. The Wetland Reserve is an oasis for migratory birds and it covers roughly 12km². While most of the springs dried in 1992, artificial springs are maintained to keep the site as a tourist attraction.



#### Household level

Those respondents who can afford games and other play aids acknowledge the importance of a playful environment inside the household.

One interviewee plays Lego and puzzles with their children. Other play aids like toy cars occupy both her daughter and son; while limited in number, these toys encourage collaboration and creative interactions. Another interviewee tries to keep their children from using smartphones or watching television. Instead, she attempts to "read them and teach them as much as possible" The Montessori school reportedly distributes story books to some households.





Educational approaches that centre on play have proven successful in Azraq. The Montessori school, which develops child-centred approaches based on careful observations of child behaviour, is run by the Nashmiyat Al-Badyah Association. This constitutes an accessible, playful and stimulating childcare environment and includes kindergarten levels: "Kids really loved this more than writing on paper"70. **Scaling this approach** will not only ensure children can access explorative, playful and unstructured learning opportunities, but also that more facilities will become available as alternatives to the home nurseries that some residents are sceptical of. Another initiative called 'Madrasati', funded by Queen Rania Foundation, also demonstrated the promise of innovative, student-centred teaching methods: "the fresh air, music, and interactive methods were very useful and made the students very enthusiastic about the learning process"71. Re-mobilising these interventions can address the 'rigidity' of the current curriculum.



#### City level

With support from non-state actors, unused government lands could become accessible and stimulating play spaces that caregivers and families can visit. An influx of tourist activity might provide the additional push needed for these spaces to be developed. In its 2016 Local Economic Development Strategy, the Azraq municipality identified "ample opportunity" to develop and promote agri-, eco- and community-based tourist attractions, with a focus on integrating renewable energy and water conservation into every intervention. This sets a firm basis for greener and more natural environments in Azraq should these plans come to fruition.



#### **Azraq Alive**

Azraq Alive is an initiative, a project and a vision that takes a community-based approach to connecting different individuals, communities and households in and outside of Azraq town. The initiative has been running in Azraq for two years, and it includes several interventions that are described in this report. Azraq Alive is funded by Civic and it is delivered in collaboration with Majilisna, a non-profit organisation that focuses on improving the quality of life within Jordanian communities, with a particular focus on children and their caregivers. The Azraq Alive initiative takes a child-centred approach insofar as this contributes to the wellbeing of the entire community. Specifically, its framework aims to provide a solid, open-ended understanding of how child-friendly interventions tackle the issues and needs faced by all people living in both Azraq camp and Azraq town.

# SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Communities in Azrag clearly hold some degree of influence in physical restructuring. Examples of this include ongoing disagreements between the community and the municipality about the new water purification plant, and one community's influence over the location of a Civic play space that it feared would increase levels of noise. This influence should be leveraged, but in a sensitive way that acknowledges the voices of those who have had less say in the past. Doing so will make interventions more relevant. and, possibly, sustainable.

At the very least, distinct experiences and needs related to caregiving - adequate play space, childcare, areas to congregate and socialise, skills training - should be mainstreamed in budget discussions as fundamental considerations before any allocations for funding are made. A natural starting point may be the development division that works to embed childfriendliness and safety in municipal spaces. Identifying champions in this division and encouraging them to meet with caregivers will be an important first step to increasing representation of caregivers and children at the city level.



#### Household level

Social Committees convened by CARE International provide vocational opportunities for unemployed caregivers. Women attend sewing courses, after which they are provided with a sewing machine and supplies like scissors and threads. Similar opportunities exist for beauticians and cooks. In result, one interviewee claimed that "many women have started working"<sup>72</sup>.

These schemes support similar initiatives like the Makers Oasis, where entrepreneurial caregivers create "custom products", such as clothing, that they sell from their homes or at a larger scale to customers as far away as Amman. The Makerspace is a multi-purpose facility created as one of Azraq Alive and Civic's projects. It is supported by Azraq Municipality and an organisation called TechWorks. The facility contains workshops containing various equipment and tools, including laptops, a 3D printer, a laster cutting machine, drills and more. All individuals and organisations are welcome to use the Makerspace for free; users need only to provide materials. Training in knitting and sewing is also available here, and caregivers can leave their children to play while they work. In fact, the space contains numerous books and stories that children are encouraged to read while their caregivers work.



It seems that communities in Azraq hold some influence in decision-making. Civic approached a neighbourhood offering to build a play space on the land between their households, as part of its Model Neighbourhood programme (see text box below). The community refused on the basis that this would increase levels of noise; instead, they requested that the space be built on the land behind their households and they subsequently participated in the initial design process.

Similarly, the municipality plans to build a water purification plant in the town but ongoing disagreements with community members over the plant's location have stalled progress. Again, this suggests that community perspectives are considered in urban interventions. That said, and as discussed above, the extent to which all perspectives within a neighbourhood – i.e. those of women and young people – are considered is less clear.

#### The Open House:

Near to the Makers Oasis is The Open House, a tourism development project in northern Azraq. Azraq Alive transformed this previously abandoned building into a vibrant 'gallery'. The space contains the stories of residents of Azraq, which have been collected by members of the Civic team to capture the story fo the town through its inhabitants. The Open House is also a staging area for the products in the Makers Oasis, and it is planned to become a selling point for these products. Currently, it can be booked as a multipurpose hall; different groups have used it as a workshop space, a meeting space and as a gathering area for the community. Notably, The Open House is supervised by local people who work in the Makerspace.





#### **City level**

## The municipality earmarks a budgetary allocation for parks and playgrounds and there is a committee that specialises in public space.

This committee is responsible for identifying locations and implementing interventions. In addition to this, one respondent referred to a development division that focuses on child-friendliness and safety in the creation of new spaces. Another respondent complimented Azraq's municipal representatives for "working hard" and attending to the needs of the population. For example, the municipality will host workshops in both the north and south of Azraq to decide where and on what funding should be spent. Leveraging these municipal champions is a promising entry point for more child-centred public space in Azraq, which currently is significantly lacking.

#### **Model Neighbourhood:**

In partnership with the New Azraq Municipality and Linework Design Studio, Civic's Model Neighbourhood is an urban upgrading project that aims to develop the Al Tatweer Al Hadari Area (translates to Urban Development Area), one of Azraq town's more underdeveloped sites.

Originally, the Model Neighbourhood was intended as a growing project that Civic and the NGO, Majilisna, could jump-start through several small interventions. However, the coronavirus pandemic has stalled progress, and the original November 2020 deadline for completion has been pushed forwards. The Model Neighbourhood consists of three different elements, all of which will proceed when lockdown restrictions allow.

#### Mala'ab Al Tatweer: The Soccer Field rehabilitation

Located close to the main street in town, a soccer field was constructed to create a play space for residents living in Al Tatweer. Over time, and after years of use, the playground has degraded and is in need or rehabilitation. Civic are currently in the first phase of this process, and construction is ongoing.

## Al Dowwar: The Urban Gardening and semi-private area

In the heart of the El Tatweer community, there is a plot of land that is surrounded by residential units. This plot of land became a site of conflicting interests as the municipality believed it would be an excellent location for a park, while the local community rejected this idea completely. Azraq Alive came in with the idea to develop the plot into an area for urban gardening, which was accepted by both the ckmmunity and the municipality. The designs are currently in development by Civic's partner, Linework.

#### Mantiqat Alla'eb: The Kid's Playing Area

This is a deserted plot of land that falls between one of the schools in Al Tatwee and the urban gardening site. Civic hope to create a simply, contextually-relevant design that can be installed by the municipality.

Overall, the Model Neighbourhood programme intends to upgrade these locations to create a better environment for young children. In doing so, it will connect the three interventions with smaller interventions and spaces.



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