

Laidlaw Project Report

Organization: EMERGENCY ONG

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I arrived in Milan, Italy, on the first of June, full of anticipation and ready to begin my work with Emergency, an organization dedicated to providing healthcare to those who need it most. June 3rd marked the official start of my journey. On my first day, I was introduced to the Emergency headquarters—a bustling hub of activity, where I was warmly welcomed by the team I would be working closely with. This team consisted of two dedicated nurses, a compassionate cultural mediator, and a knowledgeable doctor. The headquarters itself was impressive, reflecting the organization's commitment to its mission, and I spent my initial day acclimating to this new environment, familiarizing myself with the layout, and learning the nuances of the Italian transit system—an essential skill for navigating Milan.

From the second day onward, my experience deepened as I began rotating through the various mobile clinics operated by Emergency. These clinics were nothing short of remarkable. Each day, I encountered people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, all seeking the healthcare that they desperately needed. It was a profound experience to witness the melting pot of languages—Italian, French, Spanish, Arabic—spoken by the patients. This diversity highlighted the incredible work Emergency was doing, providing care to those who often found themselves marginalized in the healthcare system. Despite the language barrier I faced, which was at times challenging, the opportunity to observe and be part of this important work was incredibly rewarding.

After spending two and a half weeks in Milan, my journey took me to Southern Italy, to a town called Castel Volturno. Here, I was immersed in an entirely different cultural experience. As a Nigerian, I thought I was prepared for anything, but nothing could have fully prepared me for

what I encountered in Castel Volturno. It was as if a piece of Nigeria had been transplanted into Italy—African stores lined the streets, a woman selling meat pies stood in front of one of the clinics, and the vibrant colors of Ankara prints were a common sight. The town felt like a slice of home, thousands of miles away from Nigeria.

Castel Volturno is home to a large and vibrant migrant community, predominantly made up of Nigerians. Walking through the streets felt like stepping into another world. The air was filled with the scents of traditional Nigerian dishes, the sounds of Pidgin English and native Nigerian languages, and the sight of people who, like me, had come from a land far away. This community had managed to carve out a space for themselves in a foreign land, creating a home away from home. It was a testament to the resilience and strength of Nigerian culture, which has thrived even in the face of significant challenges.

The sense of community in Castel Volturno was undeniable. The women I interviewed spoke about their journeys, not just to Italy, but to a new life where they had built new families with those they met along the way. These were families formed not by blood, but by shared experiences and the mutual understanding of the hardships they had endured. These women had become each other's support systems, forming tight-knit networks that provided both emotional and practical support.

The stories I heard were deeply moving. Many of these women had left Nigeria with the hope of a better life, only to face unimaginable horrors on their journey. They spoke of their harrowing experiences—being physically and sexually assaulted, forced into labor, and living in constant

fear for their lives. Many of them had been trapped in Libya for years, working under brutal conditions, often as sex workers, before finally making their way to Italy. The journey from Nigeria to Libya and then to Castel Volturno was filled with suffering, and the pain of these experiences was evident in their voices as they recounted their stories. Hearing these accounts was incredibly difficult, and it redefined my understanding of the immigrant experience. I realized that many of these women had endured hardships far beyond what I had previously imagined.

Despite the emotional weight of these interviews, they were crucial. As part of a larger project by Emergency, my role, alongside an intern from a medical school in another part of Italy, was to interview these women about their experiences with accessing healthcare as immigrants. While the focus was on understanding the barriers they faced in accessing maternal care, it quickly became clear that their journey to Italy was an inextricable part of their story. The trauma they had experienced shaped their interactions with the healthcare system, making these interviews vital not only for Emergency's understanding but also for tailoring their services to meet the specific needs of this community.

One of the most poignant realizations I had during this time was how much these women opened up to me because of our shared Nigerian background. They felt a sense of trust and connection with me, which allowed them to share their stories more freely. This connection was a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding in providing effective healthcare.

Through these interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in Castel Volturno. I learned about the cultural beliefs that had been preserved within this community and how these beliefs sometimes acted as barriers to accessing healthcare. For instance, many women avoided visiting doctors during the early stages of pregnancy due to fears of the 'evil eye' and a general mistrust of medical professionals. These insights were critical for Emergency, helping the organization to better understand the community it serves and to develop more culturally sensitive approaches to healthcare.

My time in Castel Volturno was an eye-opening experience that offered me a unique perspective on the migrant journey and the challenges of integrating into a new healthcare system. It also deepened my appreciation for the role of NGOs in providing essential services to marginalized communities. The work done by Emergency in these mobile clinics is not just about providing medical care; it's about understanding and addressing the broader social and cultural factors that impact health outcomes. This experience has left a lasting impression on me and has significantly informed my understanding of global health challenges.

SMART Goals Reflection

Goal: Enhance Understanding of Emergency's Operations and Initiatives through Active Participation

Specific: My goal was to enhance my understanding of Emergency's operations by actively participating in their activities in Milan and Castel Volturno /Naples. This involved engaging with the team, attending mobile clinics, and exploring community centers to identify barriers to access and cultural considerations in maternal healthcare for migrant women.

I achieved this by immersing myself in Emergency's operations from the moment I arrived in Milan. I began by familiarizing myself with the headquarters and meeting the team, which included nurses, a cultural mediator, and a doctor. This initial engagement was crucial for understanding the organization's structure and approach. In Milan, I attended multiple mobile clinics, observing how healthcare was provided to a diverse range of immigrant patients. The experience in Milan allowed me to see firsthand the daily operations and the challenges faced by both healthcare providers and patients.

Measurable: My progress was measured by the depth of my participation in activities and my interactions with the Emergency team and community members. I tracked my involvement through the number of mobile clinic sessions attended and the extent of my engagement with the team and patients.

I actively participated in over ten mobile clinic sessions and engaged with various community centers. This involvement was critical for gathering insights into the operations and identifying the barriers and cultural considerations that affect healthcare access for migrant women.

Achievable: The goal was achievable through focused effort, collaboration with Emergency staff, and effective use of available resources. My proactive approach and engagement with the team facilitated a thorough understanding of the operational and cultural aspects of Emergency's work.

I collaborated closely with Emergency's staff and utilized the resources available to me, such as the insights from community members and the data collected from mobile clinics. This collaboration and resource utilization enabled me to gather valuable insights and contribute to the development of culturally sensitive care strategies.

Relevant: This goal was directly aligned with the project's objective of gaining insights into Emergency's operations and improving maternal healthcare services for migrant women. By participating in various activities, I was able to understand the operational and cultural challenges that influence healthcare access.

The insights I gained from this goal directly informed the development of strategies to address the barriers identified in the community. This relevance was evident in how the information I gathered contributed to creating a focused plan for improving healthcare services.

Time-bound: The goal was set to be completed within the 6-week project duration. This timeframe ensured that I had adequate time to engage in activities, observe operations, and analyze findings effectively.

I successfully completed the goal within the 6-week period, dedicating the initial weeks to Milan and the remaining weeks to Castelvoturno. This structured timeline allowed for a comprehensive understanding of Emergency's operations and the cultural dynamics at play.

Through these SMART goals, I was able to gain a deep understanding of Emergency's operations, actively participate in their initiatives, and develop a plan to address barriers and promote culturally sensitive maternal healthcare services for migrant women. The experience provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by the community and informed the development of effective strategies to improve healthcare access.