



# RECLAIMING SMALL OPEN PUBLIC SPACES IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH

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Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh with more than 18 million citizens have only 79 parks and playgrounds. Many of these spaces are not safe, accessible or inclusive. Parks are generally not used due to lack of proper facilities and options for different age groups.

In Bangladesh, citizens are not active participants in the development process which has resulted in many of their demands and needs being largely unheard.

Considering these, Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust in collaboration with UN-Habitat and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), improved small unused spaces as a way of demonstrating that public spaces can be integrated into neighbourhoods and that the government can increase community participation both through technology and non technological solutions like community meetings.

We redesigned five small scale open public spaces in Mirpur area of Dhaka.

WBBT selected five small spaces to be converted as public spaces in ward 2,4,5 and 9 in Mirpur area, of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). More than 1 million live around these sites. At least half of them are beneficiaries after implementation of the project.

The intervention brought opportunities for low income groups who are unable to access quality public spaces. Also, women, girls, toddlers, youth, person with disabilities and elderly people are getting priority after intervention.



# The sites before intervention



Picture 5: Ward 2, Pallabi (road 5/6)



Picture 6: Ward 2, Pallabi (road 17)



Picture 7: Ward 5, Bauniabadh Eidgah Playground



Picture 8: Ward 4 Playground



Picture 9: Ward 9, Golartek Playground



Residents creating design in a Minecraft workshop

*Use of Minecraft is an innovative approach and the use of technology. By giving local residents an opportunity to use the game to design their own space, we were able to create a unique environment to encourage community engagement.*

Community engagement, capacity building and infrastructure changes were the strategies used to achieve our objectives.

Use of Minecraft proved to be a valuable tool in helping the community envision the changes they wanted to see to the spaces. Using technology in this way allowed community residents to express their needs and demonstrate what they wanted visually and their ideas and wishes were then successfully executed.



Community consultation during Minecraft workshop



Community sharing their designs



Design validation workshop with community

The project was solely based on participatory approach. Around 77 meetings were organised with 389 participants.

These meetings helped to build relation with the community and gave them idea about the project, increased understanding of the necessity of public spaces, and ensured participation in the Minecraft and validation workshops.

More than 24 meetings were organised with ward councillors, ward secretary, political leaders. Also, 280 volunteers contributed to improve the sites and spent 840 volunteer hours.



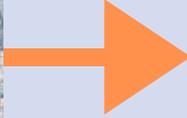
Work opening in ward 2, Pallabi (road 5/6)

In the work opening of 5 spaces, 333 participants and in the inauguration ceremonies a 676 people were present including community people, local leaders and government officials. The project brought 134 changes in the selected 5 spaces.





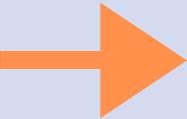
Infrastructure change in mini-park of Pallabi (road 5/6) includes 1 monkey bridge, 1 see-saws, 2 swings, 2 slides, 3 exercise equipment, 100 plants, 8 benches, 7 stools, 2 tables, 80 trees decorating, 1 big round shape concrete platform including 10 blocks for children to count the numbers and run, 1 signboard, remove grill wall from 4 plots for open the space for all and clean huge trash.



Infrastructure change in mini-park of Pallabi (road 17) includes 1 monkey bridge, 1 see-saws, 2 swings, 2 slides, 3 exercise equipment, 100 plants, 6 benches, 8 stools, 2 tables, 50 trees decorating, 1 big round shape concrete platform including 10 blocks for children to count the numbers and run, 2 wall colouring, 1 signboard and clean huge



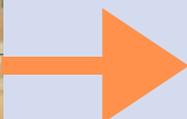
Infrastructure change in the children zone of Bauniabad playground includes 1 monkey bridge, 1 see-saws, 2 swings, 2 slides, 1 safety net, 8 plants, 4 benches, 4 stools, 1 tables, 8 trees decorating, 150 bollards, and 1 signboard.



Infrastructure change in the children zone of the ward no. 4 playground includes 1 monkey bridge, 1 see-saws, 2 swings, 2 slides, 3 exercise equipment, 100 plants, 6 benches, 4 stools, 1 table, 70 trees decorating, 1 wall repairing, 3 wall colouring, 1 monument (shahid minar) colouring, 15 bollards and run, 1 signboard and clean huge trash.



Infrastructure change in the children zone of Golartek playground includes 1 monkey bridge, 1 see-saws, 2 swings, 2 slides, 1 safety net, 100 plants, 6 benches, 6 stools, 2 tables, 1 wall coloring, 150 and 1 signboard.







## Challenges

Though we successfully implemented the project, it did not happen without facing challenges. Originally our plan was to implement the project in 5 different wards (2,4,5,7 and 9). After completion of designing and validation phase, we went for implementation. But we faced a huge protest from a group of youths of community and was forced to shut our work in ward no 7. Immediately, we shifted our work in another site of ward 2 and successfully implemented the project.

## Our Results

Mostly low income groups live in the surrounding areas of the improved spaces. Children of these communities hardly have opportunities to access equipment like- slides, swings, see-saws etc. As a result of adding 5 small scale public spaces in Mirpur area, children of the surrounding communities have fun places where they can play with a sense of comfort and safety. Most importantly there is a significant increase in the number of girls and women visitors.

Also, government was well involved with the project in all phases. Total 33 meetings were organised including one to one meeting where 67 government representatives participated and contributed 201 hours of in-kind contribution to the project. DNCC has committed to replicate the model to improve small scale public spaces in other communities and allocated US\$ 240,000 to complete rest of the work of the sites as follows the plan and design.

Users of Spaces per day	Before	After
# of total people	1291	6825
# of women	205	2958
# of children (below 8)	199	5257