

Summary Report 2021-2022

Digo Bikas Institute (DBI) works to ensure people's rights to health and to improve the health of urban residents. DBI currently focuses on creating safe streets for walking, cycling, and community activities, open public spaces such as parks, markets and urban agriculture. The following outlines our work from 2021 to 2022.

Open Public Spaces

Considerable effort was focused on the municipality of Biratnagar from 2021 to 2022. These efforts resulted in the municipality approving a budget that would ensure one park or open public space project per ward in the 2022-2023 year. This was an important commitment and, when fully implemented, will result in local residents being able to access a park or public spaces within a reasonable distance of their homes. In addition, Biratnagar Municipal Assembly also approved the formation of a City Volunteers Committee that will consist of 2 volunteers per ward for a total of 38 members. The Committee will work on research, planning and development of different activities for the welfare of the urban environment of the municipality.

Also in Biratnagar, DBI identified the need to create a land use map that would outline the municipality's open public spaces, markets, and agriculture areas. This resulted in the municipality agreeing to create a municipal map with detailed information on the land use zones within its jurisdiction. This map will support developing municipal strategy documents, such as the Municipal Transport Master Plan, and can assist in planning for parking management, business zones, open space accessibility standard, and weekly market development plans.

Finally, DBI supported a participatory approach to planning an open public space in Biratnagar. The consultation activities with the community helped ensure that design development agencies, community user groups and municipal agencies had a platform to connect more regularly. This resulted in a design for the development of a religious site with a pond to become a more public multi-functional space for the southern end of Biratnagar. Work is expected to begin on the development of the site in 2023 as the municipality dedicated budget towards the project and has signed a contract with the developer.



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Streets

In addition to our work in Biratnagar on open public spaces, we also worked with the municipality on their streets program. The implementation of the Himalayan Vehicle Free Zone in Biratnagar was interrupted by the local election. We worked to raise awareness among the different candidates. With the elections now finished, the project is almost complete with only the final finishing touch remaining to inaugurate the space. The changes include brick and stone pavements, a street stage platform, a water fountain and a street amphitheatre. A floor was created with local grass and local herbs and trees have been planted as per the new design. Many events such as rally start points, an electric transport exhibition, a food festival and music events have already been organized in the space. These activities began while the project was still in its development phase because of its placement, history of past events in the past and new multifunctional design.

The Car-free City Centre Concept is in its final stage of completion. The concept was introduced by DBI and we have assisted the municipality in implementing activities such as a public perception study, developing a design, and assisting with technical support where required. The space will create one of the most family-friendly, inclusive and accessible public spaces in the centre of Biratnagar. This intervention has already supported discussions about developing open street projects in other cities of Province 1.

In addition, Biratnagar Municipal Assembly approved a budget for improving footpaths in the main market street based on this study by DBI.

We also work extensively in Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) on streets related projects. Kathmandu has created a dedicated budget for research and development on the pedestrianization of streets in the core area of Kathmandu. The core area of Kathmandu is important because the community was built before the introduction of private vehicles and thus is a mixed-used, pedestrian-scale neighbourhood. It includes Ason Bazar, the historic market street that was part of the Indo-Tibet trade route and Thamel, the tourist business hub of modern Nepal. At present, the core area is full of traffic and this has caused the local community members to begin leaving the area. Vehicle regulation has been endorsed by the heritage and tourism department of KMC as a strategy that could strongly contribute to the socio-cultural revitalization of the heritage economy as well.



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Vehicle regulation and economic revitalization of core Kathmandu will also contribute to efforts of vehicle regulation in other historic settlements in Nepal as well as contribute to new settlement developments based on mixed-use, pedestrian scale and people-centric design. In addition, KMC passed a new bylaw to support a Heritage Home development policy that encourages the conservation and redevelopment of traditional architecture. As part of this policy, KMC has included vehicle regulation policies that encourage vehicle-free areas as part of the neighbourhood-scale heritage conservation plan. This policy officially establishes relations between heritage conservation and pedestrianization.

In order to create greater levels of community support for streets that support walking and cycling, we organized several community events. The Kirtipur Bicycle Manifesto Workshop was conducted between bicycle advocates, advocates of open public space, public transport and walkability along with the members of academia and those from political backgrounds. This workshop discussed the need to include inclusive and sustainable city development in every master plan of the city in every municipality targeting the time of local election. Kirtipur bicycle declaration 2079 B.S. (Nepali Year) was also made public, which created awareness of this important issue among various national media organizations. This declaration established the bridge between academia and advocacy groups and the declaration was also shared between candidates of the municipal assembly and ward offices.

We conducted another workshop with the participation of the candidates of different municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley to orient them about the issues of urban development and equity and linking those issues to the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants from Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Kirtipur, Banepa and Thimi participated to express their commitment and interest in urban issues including walkability, bicycle and public transport. Two of the candidates were elected as the mayor of Lalitpur and Kirtipur. They have worked on different bicycle-friendly projects, such as creating bicycle infrastructure, which will be helpful as we work towards bicycle policy.



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Finally, we helped organize a ‘Ringroad: Citizen’s Concern’ campaign to demand an accessible and inclusive ring road for everyone. A public event was organized with more than 300 people from different user groups (wheelchair users, cyclists, people living with blindness, children and various individuals) who participated in the civic march demanding a safe and inclusive Ring Road. This was the first event organized between such diverse groups working on accessibility and the appeal was acknowledged by the Ministry and Department of Roads under which the project is happening.

Markets and Urban Agriculture

Initial consultation with municipal agencies on policies related to markets and agriculture suggested there is a lack of technical support to produce municipal policy on these issues. We conducted regular policy advocacy to establish the correlation between land use policy and scope of urban agriculture. DBI has also been regularly engaged with the Department of Municipal Police of Biratnagar, who lead market management work, to orient them on the co-relation between traffic management, public transport plan and market management. We were unable to identify areas dedicated to agriculture or public markets in Biratnagar and Dharan in municipal documents. Based on a literature review and a stakeholder consultation with local representatives and user groups, we identified that the traditional practice of haatbazaars (weekly markets) linked to markets and agriculture together, along with a policy that addresses its significance, would address both market and urban agriculture. We mapped all the Haatbazar operating in all the 19 wards of Biratnagar Metropolitan City. This map shows that there are 33 functioning haatbazaars in Biratnagar that operate in different time frequencies from daily for limited hours to weekly or biweekly. We also identified that no specific policy or programs to support or study haatbazaars were conducted in the past except management of traffic and replacement of some haatbazaars. The study creates a database for further analysis of the correlation between haatbazaars, urban agriculture and local markets.

