

Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB)

2024-2025 Summary Report



WORK FOR A BETTER BANGLADESH (WBB)

In 2024–2025, WBB Trust advanced work across five core thematic areas in Bangladesh despite political unrest and a significant government transition. A political transition mid-year resulted in the formation of an interim government, forcing non-government and civil society organizations to rework their strategies. While the national context limited policy and advocacy efforts, WBB responded by deepening community engagement, strengthening local partnerships, and building capacity among new government officials, while keeping core project goals intact.

Streets:

Implementation of the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) remained a central pillar of WBB’s efforts. The team worked to support the DAP 2022–2035 by advocating for pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, improved non-motorized transport (NMT), vendor inclusion, and strategies to reduce private car usage. Following the government shift, the focus moved toward rebuilding institutional relationships and sensitizing new officials to the importance of creating livable cities. By rebuilding these relationships, we hope to ensure that the livable cities concepts that are included in the plan are prioritized. In addition to ensuring that officials understand the principles of livable cities, it is equally essential that the public is informed about these concepts and actively advocates for the development of livable cities.

To sensitize the public, we organized community-led car-free street initiatives continued in Mohammadia Housing, Shyamoli, Khilgaon, and Old Dhaka, engaging 70–80 people each week over 22 weeks of regular activities, along with 20 related public events and campaigns. DAP says that, pedestrian movement and non-motorised transport (NMT) shall be prioritized in the road hierarchy, particularly on local and collector roads. If pedestrian and NMT movement must be prioritized, then temporarily restricting private motor traffic, even for limited hours or days, fulfils that mandate. Car-Free Street activations function as pilot implementations of pedestrian priority. These campaigns raised awareness among the public about the ways streets can support community activities and gave residents an opportunity to experience the changes we are demanding.

Despite the bureaucratic challenges, advocacy yielded results: the interim government maintained its support for DAP and new public transport initiatives were launched in response to our engagement.



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Mobile Playgrounds : In underserved neighbourhoods, we organized Mobile Playgrounds in order to reduce spatial inequality in these communities by providing safe, inclusive play spaces in neighbourhoods where no parks or play spaces exist. Despite disruptions due to political curfews and community partner withdrawals, WBB managed to sustain operations in four communities and launched a new site in Mirpur. Weekly events provided play opportunities for 70–80 children (about 350 in total across all locations), with the majority being girls in each location. These activities were co-designed with community input and are being increasingly managed by local groups and schools, contributing to long-term ownership and resilience. Over 135 weeks of play were recorded during this reporting period, and one pilot in Mirpur attracted over 200 children on its launch day.

Active School Routes to School (ASRTS) : initiative built momentum in Rayerbazar through a mix of youth engagement, community planning, and institutional outreach. Partnering with BRAC University and Cardiff University, WBB facilitated a participatory neighbourhood planning process, bringing students and residents into direct dialogue about safe school access. Sixty-nine students submitted letters to DNCC demanding change, and 8 workshops were held to create neighbourhood plans for child- and youth-friendly environments. The administrator of DNCC committed to implementing part of the community-generated plan, and Zone 5 officials received the full proposal for consideration. Despite restrictions on tactical urbanism under the interim government, micro-greening and advocacy efforts are planned for 2025-2026 to keep the momentum.





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Open Public Space:

We promoted inclusive, accessible public spaces in Dhaka by advocating for policy implementation and community stewardship. While existing laws and policies in Bangladesh emphasize the preservation of parks, playgrounds, and open public spaces, their implementation and on-the-ground reality present opportunities for further strengthening. WBB maintained pressure on city corporation authorities to protect and expand parks, playgrounds, and lakes. Special focus was given to saving Panthokunja Park and Hatirjheel Lake. These two spaces are under threat due to the construction of an expressway. Community campaigns and research reports were shared with stakeholders, including findings on threats from infrastructure development and budget allocation disparities. Four public events helped to raise demand for inclusive OPS, and WBB coordinated a 167-day-long awareness campaign to save Panthokunja Park along with other organizations and activists. The budgets allocated for OPS in Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Corporation rose significantly during this time.

The media played a key role, with over 200 articles and 150+ social media posts bringing visibility to the campaign. However, accessibility and inclusivity in park renovations remain inadequate, and advocacy continues to address these shortcomings.





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Markets:

With funding from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, we created 16 farmers markets where people can buy fresh produce directly from farmers. This initiative was highly successful and although our funding ended in 2023, 13 of the 16 markets are still operating. Each week, about 12,800 people are served by these markets with safe and fresh vegetables and fruits.

We continue to monitor the 13 ongoing farmers' markets and initiated efforts to reopen two additional markets, and participated in relevant network programs. Although political changes disrupted some of our plans, the groundwork for sustainable market systems was strengthened.



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In the 2024–2025 reporting year demonstrated WBB’s adaptability and resilience. Across all five initiatives, the team advanced practical, community-rooted strategies while maintaining policy-level pressure where possible. These collective efforts have laid foundations for the post-transition period, with evidence-based advocacy, informed communities, and empowered partners poised to scale up impact in the years ahead.



