

CREATING GREAT PUBLIC SPACES IN INDIA

We organized a successful program that created great public spaces for Indian cities.

Keywords:
Public Space, Inclusive Parks, Children, Parks, Health

Project Partner: Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF)

Location: Bangalore in Karnataka, Nagpur in Maharashtra and Malappuram and Thrissur in Kerala.
Duration: 2010 - ongoing

Target Issue and Target Group

Although Indian law requires 15% of land to be allocated for green space, neighbourhoods continue to lack public spaces. Indian cities have seen a substantial increase in the demand for commercial and residential property development, which has resulted in the majority of public spaces being encroached onto or redeveloped for other purposes. The remaining spaces are frequently ignored and left to deteriorate, which discourages the population from using them. ESAF targets the public spaces available in three states in India and transforms them into usable spaces that are welcoming for social and civic engagement.

The target group for this project is people of all ages, with a special focus on children, children with disabilities, and women in the neighbourhood of the selected public space.



This project supported women, who previously had been inactive, to visit the spaces and participate in various physical activities and to socialize with their neighbours.

Strategies Employed within Project

We use several key strategies to create great public spaces. We conduct research, including mapping public spaces in selected communities and developing a greater understanding of the park quality. We identify and involve key stakeholders and engage local community members to ensure the spaces created meet the community's needs. We also provide capacity and skill training to ensure that the residents, organizations, and governments involved have the skills to transform their space.

Advocacy strategies include organizing meetings and park visits with stakeholders, government officials, and elected representatives. This creates greater awareness about how the parks can be used for fun, socializing, health and community cohesion. We then organize design charrettes where all stakeholders come together to redesign the space. This ensures the needs of different groups are



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met. We also work with the media to raise awareness among the general public about the ways that public spaces benefit the community. Once the government officials complete the changes to the public spaces, we organize park programs that re-introduced the residents to the park.

Project Reach

Over 11,000 children are now able to play in a safe, fun, public space close to their home. Of these children, 40% are girls. The project has created inclusive play spaces giving approximately 6500 children with special needs a fun place to play with their peers. Over 500 women are regularly visiting the parks and volunteering their time to organize activities with the children.

Preliminary Results

The project has greatly improved 17 public spaces and as a result thousands of children now have an opportunity to play in a fun and safe public space close to home. Community members are acting as caretakers in the public spaces and supporting the government to maintain them. In addition, the awareness that the project managed to raise among government officials has resulted in the Nagpur Municipal Corporation to incorporate inclusive play space design into all future parks.

In total there has been a significant increase in the funds allocated for parks and public spaces as a result of the project: 20 million INR (~\$300,000 USD) for park/public space development and 5.6 million INR (~\$83,000 USD) to rejuvenate waterbodies and ponds. Finally, the project has built capacity among administrators and elected officials to develop and maintain parks and an increased capacity among citizens to advocate for, design, and maintain parks.

Impact

- Many parks have become functional which were previously underused and dysfunctional.
- Local government officials are now advocating with the state government for an increase in budget allocation and spreading the message of inclusive play space.
- Inclusive play spaces ensured the rights of differently able children to play.
- This project supported women, who previously had been inactive, to visit the spaces and participate in various physical activities and to socialize with their neighbours.

Take-away Messages from the Project:

- Assemble baseline information on the public spaces of your community.
- It is important to ensure the community understands the need for public spaces and is involved in their design.
- Create good rapport with government officials and elected members, which helps to bring changes in the policies and practices. This includes regularly keeping them updated and engaging them on specific activities.
- Continuously follow-up the community until they feel able to continue the program on their own. This creates feels of support and enables the community to take ownership of the program.

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