



PUBLIC SPACE SAFETY AUDIT

KABUL | AFGHANISTAN

TOWARDS SAFETY FOR ALL IN PUBLIC SPACES ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN & GIRLS



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The methodology used in this report is based on the UN-Habitat’s Global Public Space Programme City-wide public space inventory and assessment. UN-Habitat’s City Prosperity Initiative uses the City Prosperity Index which is a sampling methodology and there is a difference in the data reported. The data is also based on time and day of the survey and may vary due to weather condition and user perception.

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AFGHANISTAN · KABUL

PUBLIC SPACE SAFETY AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT

Towards safety for all in public spaces especially for women & girls

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DEFINITIONS

Antisocial behaviour

Any action that can cause nuisance or annoyance to anyone.

Experiences of crime/harassment

To encounter/undergone a form of crime or harassment,

Gender equity

The process of being fair to both women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Gender equity strategies are used to eventually attain gender equality. Equity is the means and equality is the result.

Green network:

a system of elements characterized by ecologically based relationships interacting with the other urban systems (Jim & Chen, 2003; Mahmoud & El-Sayed 2011; Oh et al., 2011)

Harassment

A wide range of acts or behaviors, often of a sexual nature, which are unwanted and offensive to the recipient.

Infrastructural problems

Issues related to the physical state of public spaces.

Mono-functional spaces

Spaces that are limited to only one activity.

Multi-functional spaces

Spaces that are used for different types of activities at different times of the day.

Perception of safety

A generalized judgment about the chance of crime. Different times of day, and physical location may affect perception of safety.

Pluri-funtional spaces

Spaces with different kinds of activities at the same time.

Public space

All places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. UN-Habitat categorises public spaces into streets, open public spaces, and public facilities.

Social problems

Issues arising from societal factors.

Urban Safety

Safety does not only mean lack of criminal behavior, fear or aggression. Safety points to the certainty of being respected as an individual at the physical, social and psychological levels. ‘Safety’ goes beyond the multiple ways of crime and violence. In fact, safety is firstly a foundation for the deployment of human abilities, freedom, solidarity, multiculturalism and creativity. Safety does not only cover the individual’s life, but embraces also society and the city. Safety is also a social value, since it is the foundation for the common good of societies that allows a fair and equitable development for all its members. Safety is one of the pillars of good governance and is the basis of freedom and equality for people’s full and equal

Walkability

Defines much more than just providing citizen with “the ability to walk”. Several characteristics result in optimal walkability such as physical access, places and proximity. Defining a walkable neighbourhood extends beyond pedestrian concerns, as the ability to walk in a neighborhood indicates not only a type of mobility and means of travel, but also a type of sociability between neighbors, which, together, likely affect the physical, mental, and health of people in the community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

While cities are powerful engines of development and innovation, they are also home to informal settlements and many millions of vulnerable women and girls. Sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces are present in every country, in rural areas as well as cities, and even in online spaces. As a result, it has become an impediment to the rights of women and girls in cities, and to enjoy the opportunities of urbanisation. The outcome is often gender exclusion and the lack of participation of women and girls in development.

In theory, public spaces are accessible for everyone—yet, in practice, many powerful factors lead to the spatial domination of one group over the others (Lofland 1998; Carmona et al. 2003; Madanipour 2003; Neal 2010). Women, for example, do not have equal access to urban spaces where they fear for their safety (Ali, Coate and Goro 2000, 62). Thus, many women limit their access to public spaces because male-dominated spaces are usually associated with predictable violence (Valentine 1989, 388, 389; Fenster 1999, 3; Koskela 1999, 113; Andrew 2000, 158; Sandercock and Forsyth 2005, 75). Therefore, the crime itself, the fear of crime, and the inappropriate behaviors of some men can be powerful factors that deter women’s access to certain urban spaces.

The adoption of the 2016-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides a roadmap for an inclusive and sustainable world and requires the provision of well-designed networks of safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces and streets, free from crime and violence, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. It recognizes gender equality as a key pillar for ensuring that no one and no place is left behind. The Goal 5, “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” places the importance of ensuring gender equality to sustainable development. Although public space can become the ground for co-production of urban safety, its importance is not widely recognized in the literature and policy arena. Ending all discrimination against, and removing all economic, social, cultural and political barriers for participation of women and girls in societal development is not only a basic right, but it is one of our better chances to solving some of the world’s pressing and wicked problems.

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) also calls upon all urban stakeholders to work towards achieving gender equality and empower women and girls by ensuring their full and effective participation and equal rights in all aspects of development. It also urges city leaders to ensure full and productive employment and decent work for all, and to address and empower the working poor in the informal economy: Often, these are women.

Afghanistan is amongst the very few countries in the world that is implementing the NUA, the UN roadmap to achieve the SDG 11. Together with the national priorities of the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghansitan (GoIRA), UN-Habitat Afghanistan has committed to keep the momentum towards healthy urban

development working with the government, municipalities and communities.

In the capital city of Afghanistan, Kabul, the population has grown exponentially in the past three decades despite the conflict and instability the city has experienced. The country-wide insecurity and natural disasters have resulted to an influx of people into the city for escaping and seeking better opportunities. Its supply of public spaces has not kept up with its growing population. This has resulted in unprecedented demographic and spatial growth of the city contributing to problems already afflicting the capital: inadequate housing and infrastructure, lack of sanitation, land grabbing, environmental challenges, and rampant crime.

Today, Kabul’s public realm can be a difficult place for women. This sense of perceived vulnerability can restrict free movement around the city and participation in professional, social, and cultural activities. To address these challenges and to achieve inclusive public spaces especially for women and girls, local level data is important, in order to provide immediate and long-term recommendations for the government to consider in their policies and strategic planning. Therefore, the City of Kabul together with UN-Habitat undertook a Public Space Safety Audit.

INTRODUCTION

Kabul, among other cities in Afghanistan, has tried to leverage the goodwill of the general public to transform the city into a better one for citizens to fully enjoy their civil rights. This effort presents an opportunity to create jobs, build a sense of pride, belonging and solidarity, and mobilise the public to appropriately care for public spaces. The urban greening and sanitation initiative under the Cleaning and Greening Cities (CGC) program has made a significant investment in re-greening the city among other 12 target municipalities through tree planting, cleaning streets and retrofitting of medians. Kabul is also experiencing a renaissance of public art and an interest of the creative community in shaping public realm. One example is the façade painting campaign converting grey concrete walls into colorful talking walls highlighting local identity and values of the community.

The Public Space Safety Audit was done under the Afghanistan Urban Safety and Security Programme (AUSSP) of UN-Habitat, to not only understand the gaps in the distribution, quality, safety, accessibility and inclusivity of the public spaces but also to celebrate and support the already ongoing initiatives and programmes of the government and UN-Habitat. The survey was also a means to protect existing public spaces, improve the quality of urban spaces, revitalize street life and improve the network of interconnected streets and public spaces especially between the formal and informal areas of the city. Importantly, the results of the audit and assessment will inform policy and strategic recommendations, particularly to improve safety and security, accessibility and inclusion for women and girls in future public space upgrading or development.

Afghanistan Safer Cities Programme, titled as “Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding Programme (AUPP)-2015-2018” interpreted the concept of safety and security

to be more holistic and cover socio-economic realm, addressing issues of gender, education, employment, environment and beyond to make citizens’ life and living conditions safer and more secure. The programme successfully introduced the concept to urban planning in Afghanistan for the first time, and succeeded to the Phase II, “Afghanistan Urban Safety and Security Programme (AUSSP)” 2018-2021. In 2019, the first Public Space Safety Audit was undertaken in the country to enrich the urban data for more evidence-based policy planning and implementations, especially from the perspective of safety and security.

The pilot project was undertaken in Kabul, which is one of the eight strategic cities that AUPP and AUSSP have been operating, in order to test the methodologies which has been adjusted to the Afghan context and better showcase to the national government and other municipalities. The practical survey covered the areas under Provincial Districts (PDs) number 2, 3, 4, 10 selected based on the set criteria.

The tool that was adopted was the Public Space Assessment developed by UN-Habitat Headquarters’ Global Public Space Programme based in Nairobi, Kenya. This is a digital tool that uses a structured questionnaire that can be modified to fit any context as well as lead assessment of the priorities for development or upgrading of public space for any city. It utilises the free open source application called KoBoCollect, which is a fast and effective tool for data collection, minimising enumeration errors. The assessment helps in not only identifying needs or substantive areas to address in the city, but also how the development or upgrading process can align with other, already ongoing or planned processes. The objective of this alignment is to make possible synergies and identify institutions, organizations, agencies and other municipal departments as potential stakeholders or collaborating partners. In addition to identifying key strategies, steering documents, potential partners, etc., the key issues of the existing strategic plan (if any) should be mapped and analysed. This tool starts with answering the question “where are we?” in the realm of public space.

Since 2015, UN-Habitat has supported 27 human settlements of varying spatial scales to conduct the assessment. These include, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Wuhan, China, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Durban, South Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Khan Younis, Occupied Territory of Palestine, among others. There has also been a keen interest by other cities to use this tool for their own citywide public space strategy work. The tool is also key in monitoring and reporting on SDG 11.7 as well as toward the implementation of the NUA.

In Kabul, the questionnaire that was used to conduct the safety audit in the pilot districts was formulated by UN-Habitat Global Public Space Programme in close consultation with the AUSSP team. It was then uploaded into the Kobo toolbox server where it was made accessible to the surveyors. In addition to the questionnaire, maps were developed to aid ground-truthing and identification of public spaces as well as sketching their boundaries on the ground as of the time of the assessment.

Prior to data collection, a five-day session for meeting and training was held to provide a better understanding of public spaces and the tasks ahead. At the United Nations operational complex in Kabul, two trainings were conducted. One was an orientation for officials from Kabul Municipality while the other was administered to 25 surveyors who were recruited to support the data collection exercise.

As part of the training, the surveyors were exposed to a hands-on experience of the tool and tested the tool on the ground. Following these two exercises, they provided feedback regarding the application of the questionnaire and the usability of the tool. Based on the feedback received, some of the questions were modified to fit the local socio-spatial context.

In total, there were 67 data entry points collected, including 25 open public spaces and 42 streets. After data cleaning, 23 open public spaces and 32 streets were assessed within the four districts. The collected data was verified in a one-day workshop inviting senior officials from the municipality, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Civil Society Organizations, and communities. The validation helped in confirming credibility of the collected data and gathering additional information on the available public spaces, in parallel to raising awareness of the importance in public spaces and its proper utilities especially for women and girls. As it was the first attempt in the country, the Mayor was also very keen and cooperative to the activity, providing fullest support to UN-Habitat.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The purpose of the open public space and street assessment in the four districts was to indicate both spatial and non-spatial gaps and provide the districts and the city with a way forward for upgrading, renovation and development of streets and open public spaces that are safe for all especially women and girls. This assessment is a first step towards a more long-term strategic plan for Kabul.

Collectively in the four districts, the open public spaces account for 0.7 square kilometres, which represent only two per cent of urban land. This is against the international good practice of 15 – 20 percent of total urban land which is also supported by UN-Habitat. Measured against the population, every resident in the districts enjoys 0.7 square meters of public spaces. There is a clear disproportionate distribution across the four districts, reflecting and reinforcing social and economic inequalities, and vulnerability to multiple risks.

Within the four districts, interviews were conducted for users of public spaces. These interviews ensured that there is an age and gender balance to limit subjectivity. An analysis of responses revealed that feeling of unsafety, harassment directed to women and infrastructure problems were the main safety concerns in open public spaces. The main safety concerns along the streets were also feeling of unsafety, harassment directed to women and infrastructure problem with infrastructure problems being present in majority of the streets. This shows the need for the districts to work on ensuring that infrastructure are installed in public spaces and are maintained in

good condition for use. Additionally, these public spaces should have mixed usage and activities, for diverse user groups at different times of the day for maximizing the utility of public spaces. This will also enable to secure natural surveillance by residents and business people, and in that, there is reduced isolation and therefore contributing to a feeling of safety. Investment in street lighting and policing in public spaces and streets used at night can improve safety and reduce harassment directed to women.

Adequate and proportionate distribution of these spaces across the city – both in low-income and affluent neighborhoods, is important for fostering social cohesion and building a sense of 'collective' among residents. When creating new public spaces, attention should be paid to parts of the city where the need is greatest and where investing in public space would yield the highest impact. Essentially, the priorities should be given to areas where there are opportunities to achieve multiple effects including improving urban safety and security, reducing the risk of natural disasters such as floods, upgrading informal settlements, enhancing economy through supporting the informal and formal economy, connecting neighbourhoods and regenerating decaying inner city neighbourhoods among others. Within the four districts, approximately 48 per cent of the land requires creation of new open public spaces. This will also support creation of a green network and achievement of a higher share of land to be dedicated to open public space, which will result in increasing the per-capita public space.

To achieve the above, adequate street connectivity provides an excellent opportunity and an efficient way to disperse traffic, providing multiple choices and offering an incentive for people to walk, cycle and or embrace public transport. Where a road connection may not make sense, for example in a high-density neighborhood, a difficult terrain or an unplanned settlement, a pedestrian and bicycle connection may be a better idea to consider. This is especially applicable for the case of Kabul where the landscape has several hills and the radial road network converges in the central city, creating significant congestion. Shared streets (mix of pedestrian, cyclists and motorists) accounted for 84 per cent (27 streets) of the total streets assessed. However, within the four districts, most of these streets were informally developed as pedestrians were not prioritized in the design, therefore these streets are dominated by cars. Even with majority of the streets having designated sidewalks (30 streets), 60 per cent (18 streets) of these streets do not have a buffer between the sidewalk and the main road, leaving the street disorganized. For a successful shared street, considerations should be given where pedestrian activity is high and vehicle volumes are low or discouraged. Street width mainly ranged between 600 metres to 1,800 metres which is not enough for the typical shared streets. Overall, the street length to land area ratio is 15 km/km². This is below the recommended ratio of 18km/km², contributing to the congestion and traffic snarl-ups. There is also high number of streets with no signage for pedestrians and cyclists and 33per cent (10 streets) of the sidewalks have obstacles discouraging continuity of walking and cycling. Because of these and a general low quality of the streets, few people especially women are

walking and cycling. While some of the streets have unique characters including trees and enough pedestrian space, the Municipality needs to invest more to improve the pedestrian experience by promoting safety and security.

The indicators related to safety, inclusivity and accessibility of open public spaces and streets were analyzed and showed that safety scored the highest and accessibility the lowest while along the streets, user index scored the highest. This supported to categorize the streets and open public spaces according to the priority for upgrading. It was found that as many as 15 open public spaces and 31 streets require moderate upgrading, such as improving the road infrastructure and installing streets lighting. Majority of the public spaces require continuous maintenance while those that require upgrading are, Prozha Tadeli Wazir Abad Park, Park Behind the Red Cross Clinic, Tap-e-Kolala Poshta, Behind of Municipality Blocks Park, Wazir Akbar Khan Park, Zarnegar Park, Pul Artal Park and Qasabi Street Lane. This may suggest redesigning of the spaces through community engagement and implementing the upgrading project. It is however important to ensure that there is a clear budget allocation and involvement of key relevant stakeholders and experts in the process of upgrading and maintenance after the projects. These priority projects can be integrated into the city development plan to ensure addressing the needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The vision for the city of Kabul is to be “a green city, with ample parks and open spaces for residents to relax, gather together, and enjoy the region's natural beauty. To be a civic city, with beautiful streets, commanding views, and a grandeur appropriate for a capital city. Kabul will also be an inclusive city, with economic opportunity for everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, or circumstance”

To achieve this vision within the four districts, four goals are proposed based on this pilot, which are: create a network of public spaces to enhance climate resilience, promote safety in open public spaces and streets, provide a diverse and inclusive public space and build a positive culture for walking and cycling. Each of these goals have strategies and recommendations for their achievement, and to supplement the Kabul Urban Development Framework (KUDF). It further seeks to support the regeneration of the central city and reinforce the city's conservation and open space network strategy by supporting a balanced relationship between built and natural environment to support economic development, heritage conservation and environmental sustainability.

The Public Space Safety Audit ensures a demand-driven approach, in which the opportunities for the most deprived neighbourhoods and public spaces are maximized. To anchor the next steps of this analysis for a long-term strategy, the analysis and the identification of gaps in the existing urban policies, legal and institutional frameworks and in the planning of the districts is paramount.



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