

Management of Playground by City Corporation: An Investigation into the Nature of Problems and Future Directions for Improvement

Md. Mehedi Hasan^{*}
Adil Mohammed Khan^{**}

Abstract

This study is conducted on the playgrounds maintained under Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area. The objectives of this study was to state the present condition of the playgrounds maintained by DCC, to find out the reasons behind the deplorable condition of these playgrounds and finally to give some remedial measures for better management of these playgrounds. This study finds that, some of the playgrounds of Dhaka city are illegally occupied by different club authority and they are not accessible to the common people. Major problem of these playgrounds is lack of maintenance by the concerned authority, DCC. There is also mismanagement between authorities and problem of ownership of these playgrounds. For the better management of these playgrounds, retrieval of these playgrounds from illegal occupiers is very much necessary and moreover, proper maintenance of these grounds can ensure better environment for sports for common people of the city.

Introduction

A city is a dynamic entity composed of structured areas and open spaces. Parks and playgrounds are common places designed by the city administration so that adults and children in the city can walk, relax, play, enjoy and perform other recreation activities. It is found that the recreation activities in a big city like Dhaka are meager. The massive increase of population in Dhaka city gives rise to adverse impact on the unscathed development of the recreation facilities in the city. Hence, the city of Dhaka cannot provide facilities for recreation according to the planning standards, like any other countries of the world. It causes an inconsolable depreciation on the existing playgrounds. Scarcity of urban land and playgrounds hampers in recreation as well as land use of Dhaka City Corporation area.

As a municipal authority, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is responsible for providing recreational facility, like playgrounds to the city dwellers. But the number of playgrounds under the supervision and maintenance of DCC are quite less. However, some of the Clubs have occupied these playgrounds in the name of maintenance for years. These clubs are using the playgrounds for commercial purposes by renting them to other people. Though these playgrounds are built up for general public, there are restrictions by the club authority to use them freely for the common people (Ali, 2008). These playgrounds are neglected by the maintenance authority, DCC and the overall conditions of these playgrounds are deplorable. Moreover, some playgrounds are not established in a planned way and they fail to serve with their full capacity. As a result, it is an urgent need to supervise and monitor the activities of playgrounds regularly and recover them from illegal occupiers and make them available for the common people of the city.

Objectives and Methodology of the study

In the above background, this study aims to explore the present condition of playgrounds under the supervision of DCC and recommend some proposals towards utilizing them for recreational purposes. In order to attain this objective of the study, a reconnaissance survey of the playgrounds maintained by DCC was conducted which was followed by a questionnaire survey on the users of the ten playgrounds to ascertain the existing state of the playgrounds. Primary data and

^{*} Lecturer, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka. E-mail: mh_7704@yahoo.com

^{**} Assistant Professor, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka.
E-mail: adilmkhan@yahoo.com

information were mainly collected from DCC, RAJUK and PWD. Based on the findings of the survey, some suggestions are made for better management of playgrounds in order to provide improved recreational facilities to the dwellers.

Playgrounds Maintained by DCC

The area under jurisdiction of DCC is 154 square kilometers accommodating about 5.3 million people (BBS, 2006). DCC are responsible for maintaining eleven playgrounds in the city area which are located in ten different wards within the city (Figure 1). Among these playgrounds six of them are located in the older part of Dhaka city. This study was done on ten playgrounds in nine wards (Table 1).

Table 1: Ward wise list of playgrounds located in the Study Area

SI No	DCC Zone	Ward No.	Name of Playground	Area/Street Name
1	02	69	Bangladesh (Pakistan) <i>Math</i> (Playground)	Aga Sadek Lane
2	01	85	Golapbagh <i>Math</i>	Golapbagh
3	03	60	Lalbagh Shshmanghat <i>Math</i>	Rajnarayandhar Road
4	03	60	Killar More <i>Math</i>	Rajnarayandhar Road
5	05	49	Dhanmondi <i>Math</i>	Dhanmondi Residential Area
6	05	51	Kalabagan <i>Math</i>	Bir Uttam Khaled Mosharraf Sarak
7	09	19	Banani <i>Math</i>	Banani Residential Area
8	09	18	Gulshan Central Park	Gulshan
9	01	76	Muktijodha Sadek Hossain Khoka <i>Math</i>	Begumgonj (Dholaikhal new Road)
10	01	81	Dhupkhola <i>Math</i>	Dhupkhola

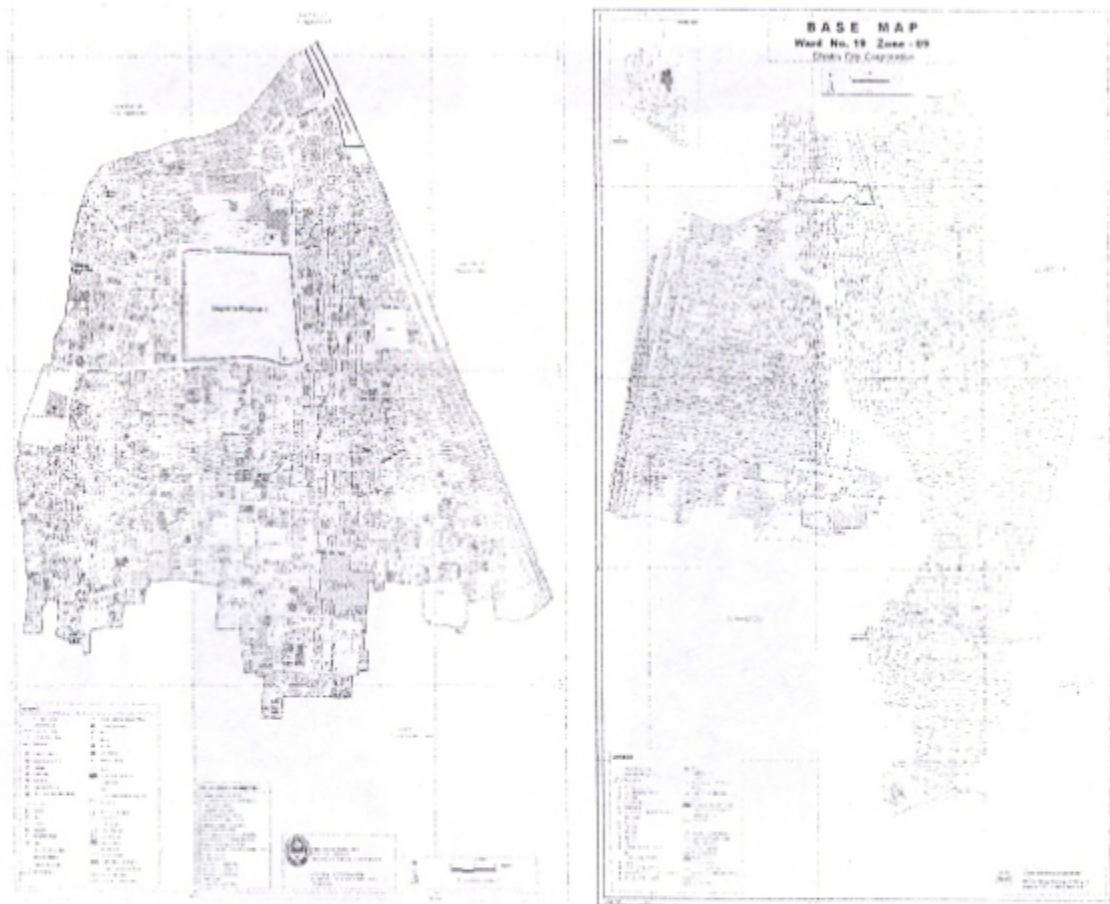
Source: Field Survey, 2008



Source: Asiatic Society, 2007

Fig. 1: Location of sample playgrounds in Dhaka city

The locations of some playgrounds at community level are shown in Figure 3. These are planned high class residential areas of Dhaka city.



Source: Field Survey, 2008

Fig. 2: Location of Dhupkhola playground, Banani playground and Gulshan central park

Policies and Regulations Regarding Open space, Parks and Playgrounds

Recreation and Open Space Policy in DMDP (1995-2015)

Recreation facilities and open space, accessible to the general public, provide an integral and necessary part of urban living, particularly in areas of high density. Facilities can be categorized under the headings of passive and active recreation, where the former are characteristically park and gardens, and the latter, facilities catering to a variety of sports, recreation and cultural activities.

(A) Policy SE/10-Augmenting City Open Space: The Municipal Planning Authority (MPA) will seek to augment the city's existing stock of major recreational facilities by means of exploiting the resource of vacant and/or under-utilized government land within the established urban area.

Reason: To prevent further impoverishment of the city's supply of such facilities, and its environment in general, by increasing public areas to publicly owned Government land and minimize cost of land acquisition.

Implementing Agency: MPA/RAJUK in liaison with Dhaka Cantonment Board, Civil Aviation Authority, DCC and Land Department.

(B) Policy SE/11 Securing Future Open Space: It is the MPA's intention to identify and secure sites for major recreational use in the DMDP Structure Plan's all priority new development areas but especially the DND Triangle and Harirampur (North of Mirpur)

Reason: These two areas, following the medium term infrastructure-led development initiatives will be the fastest growing flood protected areas in the second half of the DMDP Structure Plan period. By 2015, these areas should both well establish extensions to the existing urban areas with populations meriting their own high order social facilities and open space.

Implementing Agency: MPA/RAJUK in liaison with BWDB, and where appropriate the Parjatan Corporation and Directorate of Youth and Sports (GOB, 1997).

Playground, Open Space, Park and Natural Wetland Conservation Act, 2000

This Act was enacted to conserve the playgrounds, open spaces, park and natural wetlands located in mega-city, divisional towns, and district towns including all areas under Pourashavas. In this act, playground encompasses the master plan indicated playgrounds which are used for games, sports, or to show the sports skills.

Section 5 of the Act states that the land use change of any playground, open space, park and natural water body is prohibited. The use of these spaces for other purposes than their designated uses, or rental of these spaces or giving *izara* or transfer of these lands is also prohibited (Rahman, 2008).

Existing Condition of the Playgrounds

This study reveals that the playgrounds are absent in many wards of this city (ward no. 20, 41, 54, 60, 66, 70, 84). The children have to play on road in front of their houses (The Daily Prothom-alo, 2008). Most of the playgrounds are illegally occupied by different clubs and other institutions for many years in the name of maintenance. Despite widespread public outcry, the local people alleged that the DCC rents out the playgrounds allowing commercial events, like fair, music concerts and wedding ceremony, denying the community of their rights to open space and sporting facility (Ali, 2008). The locations of some playgrounds are not in the proper places. It is often difficult for the children to reach them as they live far from playgrounds. The children also have to cross busy roads to play in these grounds. In such a situation, the management of playgrounds by the authority also raises many questions. The playgrounds are about to be ruined for lack of maintenance. Figures 3 (a-d) depict the present condition of the playgrounds.



Fig. 3 (a): Golapbagh Playground



Fig. 3 (b): Sashmangath Playground



Fig. 3 (c): Dhupkhola Playground



Fig. 3 (d): Bangladesh Playground

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Problems and Issues

Problem of Ownership of Playgrounds: Generally, it is the responsibility of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to maintain the parks and playgrounds of Dhaka City. But, conflict arises among DCC, RAJUK and PWD regarding the matter of ownership of some playgrounds in the city area. RAJUK developed some playgrounds and handed it over to DCC for maintenance but DCC have failed to do this maintenance, instead DCC used to generate money from these playgrounds by using these spaces for commercial purposes. Recently, RAJUK has taken a drive to return the ownership of these problematic playgrounds from DCC for maintenance. For instance, Gulshan Central Park is maintained by DCC but recently RAJUK has placed a signboard mentioning the banning of commercial usage of this playground.

Moreover, there are a lot of playgrounds under the ownership of PWD and they are responsible for maintenance of those playgrounds of the city. But it is an irony of fact that PWD are not at all aware of those playgrounds, and they even have failed to provide a list of their playgrounds under their supervision. As a result, the condition of those playgrounds under the authority of PWD is not at all satisfactory for the users.

Lack of Equipment and Infrastructural Facilities: Most of the playgrounds fall short of play equipments like goal post, cricket pitch and gymnasium. Any source of potable water for drinking in the playgrounds is unavailable. Due to the absence of proper maintenances and improper drainage facilities, water accumulates in the various playgrounds of the city and does not get proper way to drain out, which eventually hampers the use of those playgrounds (Field Survey, 2008).

Lack of Maintenance: Although the maintaining authority of the playgrounds is DCC they are not concerned about their duties and responsibilities. They have no maintenance checklist or proper schedule on which basis maintenance activities will go on. Their manpower is limited even their concerned persons in these playgrounds are not usually found. No regular maintenance works of these grounds are done by DCC, however maintenance or any repair works are only occasionally done.

Use of Playground as Place of Different Types of Fair: The playgrounds are controlled by local Ward Commissioners and sometimes by the Club authority in those cases where playgrounds are illegally occupied by a Sports Club. They often rent this playground for different types of fair and also make these grounds Cattle market during Eid-ul-Azha (Ali, 2008).

Mismanagement of Authority: The role of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in maintaining the city's parks, playgrounds and open spaces has always been dubious, leaving these public places in a deplorable state. As custodian of most of the city parks and playgrounds, the DCC has miserably failed to provide the city dwellers with the minimum breathing space, said eminent city dwellers.

The aggrieved people alleged that the DCC authorities have consistently let the scanty open spaces to be misused, plundered or destroyed by certain quarters (Ali, 2008). Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, head of an advisory committee on DCC's park development and beautification program, said that the City Corporation must be accountable for what role it has been playing to conserve the parks and playgrounds. He also mentioned that "wasteful use of the playgrounds is unacceptable and it is all the more unacceptable when DCC itself indulges in it. It is very unjust to use a playfield on commercial basis" (Ali, 2008).

Despite widespread public outcry, the DCC rents out the playgrounds allowing commercial events, like fair, music concerts and wedding ceremonies in exchange of money, denying the community of their right to open space and sporting facility. Apart from Kalabagan Kira Chakra occupying Kalabagan Children's Park, Dhanmondi Club using Dhanmondi playground, Dhanmondi Cricket Academy occupying a children's park and Gulshan Youth Club occupying Gulshan Central Park, there are more examples.

Improper Arrangement of Play: There is no time schedule and arrangement of play for the users of the playground. In most of the playgrounds, it has been found that different groups of people are playing in the ground without maintaining any order or any sort of discipline while using the playfield. As a result, optimum utilization of existing spaces of the playground is not possible.

Lack of Security and Safety: Some playground have the problem of security as they are not well bounded by boundary wall and people as well as animals have access to the playground through the broken portion of the boundary wall. Moreover, there is no separate provision of space on these playgrounds for children. As a result, children usually do not feel comfortable to use these playgrounds for their recreational purpose.

Diversion into Park: Diversion of playground into park is a recent practice by the concerned authority. Walkways around the playground have been constructed to convert the playgrounds into parks. These walkways, constructed around the playground, usually interrupt the normal play in the play areas of the ground.

Major Findings of the Study

- Bangladesh *Math* has no accessibility problem but it is located away from living place of major portion of people. Grass on outfield and proper drainage system is the major demand of the local people for improving the condition of this ground.
- The removal of construction equipments and materials from Golapbagh *Math* is a major demand by the users of this ground. This ground is located beside a major road that is Sayedabad-Jatrabari road; children from south side of this ground have to cross this busy road which may cause serious accident to them.
- Killarmore *Math* and Shashmanghat *Math* are located in the ward-60 of the city. It is quite noteworthy that while some ward of the city do not have a single playground, these two playgrounds are located in the same ward in close proximity. These two playgrounds are located in the southern part of this ward far away from Shahidnagar-Beribadh road of this ward.
- Dhanmondi *Math* is illegally occupied by Dhanmondi Club for many years. Facilities of practice and equipment are available for players of the Dhanmondi Club only. This ground is located beside the major road Mirpur road and near to the Kalabagan *Math*.
- Kalabagan *Math* is illegally occupied by Kalabagan Sporting Club. This ground is available only for the players of this club.
- Banani *Math* is used by animals more than human being for their grazing. Residents of this area are not very much interested to play in this kind of playground.

- Gulshan Central Park is illegally occupied by Gulshan Youth Club. Residents of this area and other can use this ground, if they can meet up some conditions of the Authority.
- Muktijodha Sadek Hossain Khoka *Math* is located at the north-west part of ward no 76. Though this ground is well bounded, water logging is a common problem of this ground.
- Dhupkhola *Math* is in deleterious condition for prolonged mistreatment of this ground. Proper restoration and maintenance work are very much needed after retrieving this ground from the illegal occupiers.

Recommendations

It is quite an urgency that the parks and playground of the city should be saved from their ruined condition. Environmental Conservation Act and Rules should be properly implemented to make these spaces free from illegal occupiers. Clear distinction of responsibilities between developing authority (RAJUK) and maintenance authority (DCC) should be provided for the proper maintenance of the structures and equipments. Recently DCC has been conscious about the retrieval of illegally occupied park and play ground. Following measures are recommended for better management of the playgrounds.

Playground Retrievals: Dhanmondi *Math*, Kalabagan *Math*, Golapbagh *Math*, Dhupkhola *Math* and Gulshan Central Park are illegally occupied. These playgrounds should be retrieved from the occupiers by imposing the provision of the Act.

Maintenance: It is important that playgrounds are regularly maintained to ensure their availability for the user. Clear distinction between developing authority and maintaining authority of playground is urgent for proper maintenance. Community participation can be useful for the maintenance of the playgrounds.

Accessibility: Ideally, playgrounds and open spaces should be accessible to everyone in the community regardless of their abilities. Many of Dhaka City's playgrounds are inaccessible to people in wheelchairs and do not provide appropriate equipments for children with disabilities to utilize the playground. Some of playgrounds are located in such an area which make inaccessible for pedestrians. Lack of readily available information about playground locations also makes them inaccessible to new residents.

Amenities: Amenities brings in comfort and safety of children while they use the playground. Providing comfortable seating close to the play area also encourages supervision by adults. Some seating arrangement located close to the equipment for supervision, a drinking fountain, and provision of shade should be considered.

Fencing should be considered in situations, where a serious potential hazard exists such as a main road or waterway. Partial barriers erected between the equipment and the potential hazard designed to redirect children away from the dangers are recommended. Full fencing enclosures tend to give parents a false sense of security and can encourage inadequate supervision of young children.

Playground Location: The location of a playground can dramatically affect its popularity. Playgrounds located in sites that have good pedestrian traffic and overlooking from surrounding residences will be more popular with children and safer for users. Proximity to other community facilities or shops will likely to increase the use of the playground and can provide a valuable complement to the facility. Young children, especially those under six years, are generally dependent upon adults to take them to parks and play areas. Playgrounds for young children therefore need to be designed to attract adults.

Playground Proximity: All dwellings should have a local park within 500 meters of safe walking distance. In developing the Playground Strategy, 'safe walking distance' is defined as not having to cross any roads that have a speed limit of more than 50km/hr (unless a pedestrian crossing is provided).

The catchment area for each playground should be established using this criterion. i.e. user would not have to cross a busy road (road with traffic traveling more than 50km/hr) to reach it or walk more than 500 meters of distance. This information was used to establish areas, where there is a gap in the provision of playgrounds (Prellwitz, 2007).

Conclusion

It is evident from the research that people are generally interested to go to the playgrounds, but long distance and poor condition of the playgrounds discourage them to use the playgrounds. The spatial distribution of playgrounds shows that location of playgrounds is not evenly distributed throughout the City. Playgrounds should be located within ½ km from the place of living. Amenities, like pure drinking water, toilet facilities, sitting arrangement are also needed in playgrounds which are a rarity in playgrounds of Dhaka city.

The problems of the playground can not be solved very shortly. There are some legal barriers and political pressures in the procedure of removal of illegal occupiers of playgrounds in the city. There is also the problem of acute shortage of budget and manpower for the maintenance of the playgrounds. Consciousness about the playgrounds can help better management of these playgrounds. Now-a-days, media can also play an important role to raise consciousness among people. Government has to play a significant role for the removal of illegal structure from the playgrounds. Concerned authority should realize the vital role of the playgrounds in the society, and at the same time, take necessary steps to bring life back into these playgrounds.

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