

A photograph of a park scene. In the foreground, a red wooden bench with white metal legs sits on a paved path. Behind the bench is a dense green hedge. In the background, there are large trees with thick canopies, and sunlight filters through the leaves, creating a dappled light effect. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

act:onaid

PUBLIC PARKS IN DELHI

A Survey Report

Public Parks in Delhi: A Survey Report
ActionAid India
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Introduction

"The boundaries of my movement, what time I got back, who I went out with had been negotiated and pushed back over the years for a city woman to emerge on her own terms and yet stay "respectable". The boundaries were back in place."

- Aparna Karla, journalist and victim of violence.

On 5th April 2017, while taking an early evening walk in a park in Ashok Vihar, Aparna was brutally attacked by a man. She was pushed to the ground and brutally struck in the head with a rock. She was found - unconscious, in a pool of blood. Thanks to a passer-by, Aparna was rushed to a hospital where she underwent emergency surgery due to a severe haematoma (blood clot in the brain). Following the incident the police arrested one man, who is now out on bail.

Aparna's story is one of the many incidents of crime reported in public parks in Delhi. It is safe to assume that there are many other incidents involving public parks which goes unreported. Aparna's story shows how without proper safety and security measures in place, the accessibility and usability of open spaces in urban areas for certain sections of the population are affected, for the worse. It also shows the urgent need for parks that are safe, secured, well-lit and well maintained, especially for women, and particularly after dark.



Open spaces

Public parks in urban settings come under open spaces for urban residents. Open spaces are comprised of parks, green spaces, gardens, road-side plantings and natural landscapes. They play a critical role in bringing a balance between land development and urban ecology. Open spaces not only affect the urban climate for the better, but also provide residents with a relatively cleaner territory in which they can feel closer to nature, as well as the space to conduct physical exercises and recreational activities for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The significance of the open spaces in urban areas cannot be overlooked. However, as urbanisation increases, not only does it mean an increase in city population, but also a decrease in open spaces, which get replaced by concrete and built-up structures; infrastructures to accommodate the rising population, demand for housing and services.



Open spaces provide recreational areas for residents where interaction between not just people from different communities and cultures occur but also with the nature and environment. They are critical in facilitating negotiation between people to live with each other and helps in fostering a sense of 'community' and allowing diversity to flourish. These are spaces where people, regardless of social class, gender, age, religions and differences come and engage in different kinds of activities such as sports, walking, jogging, celebration, play and rest.

The importance of open spaces in cities is reaffirmed in Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 11.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal is to 'by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities'. This contributes to the overall eleventh SDG, which is to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. In order to achieve 'urban sustainability', it is important for all urban residents to have access to open spaces for citizens to interact, and to build and sustain community.

Given the aims laid out here, there is a need to take into account the nature, availability and access patterns of open spaces in the city of Delhi.



DDA Park

Looking At Indian City Plans and Urban Schemes

First of all, we analysed some selected city master plans and the national scheme Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) to understand how state and national plans are aligned to provide open space for public by all, regardless of sex, age and mobility, and safety while accessing these spaces.

When it comes to conserving green spaces in the city, most of the city plans promise to reserve a good percentage of the area for green and recreational areas. For example, the Delhi master plan claims to reserve 15% of the total urban area of Delhi, i.e. 7145 Ha, for District parks, community parks, and city parks (as per MPD 2001)¹. This area excludes northern, central and south central ridges. In some other cases, such as Patna, the city master plan promised to have 40% greenery, whereas the Bangalore master plan promised to create more parks and green recreational spaces.

Surprisingly, none of the city plans or AMRUT talk about safety, improved accessibility or better amenities for women, PwD, transgender people or children in these green areas. Given the current conditions, green spaces cannot serve their purpose if the city plans cannot ensure these basic three things. AMRUT has a

¹ Delhi Master Plan 2021, <https://dda.org.in/ddanew/pdf/Planning/reprint%20mpd2021.pdf>

provision to allot 2.5% of the budget for retaining/creating green spaces, and also talks about public engagement to build collaborative social responsibility and child friendly components, but the concerns of women and PwDs surrounding safety or accessibility go untouched.²

Public Parks Survey

With this in mind, People's Vision of the City (PvoC), ActionAid India's campaign to bring about safe, inclusive and sustainable urban development in India, conducted a survey of 71 public parks across different municipalities in Delhi to discover more about the status and conditions of accessibility, amenities, safety and security in the national capital's public spaces.

The survey was conducted by means of online mobile platforms. A survey questionnaire was first prepared on an online platform (SurveyMonkey) and the link was shared via WhatsApp to surveyors' smartphones or tablets. Using this platform, surveyors electronically entered and submitted relevant information and data about the parks they visited.

Challenges

- i. Since the survey was conducted online, access to internet was mandatory. Limited connection meant a higher chance of errors in data entry and duplicates.
- ii. The survey was conducted as an assignment for interns as part of the internship programme at ActionAid India. Due to limited resources, time restraints and various circumstances, surveys of more parks could not be conducted. The surveyors have tried to maintain a balance, however, by conducting surveys of an equal number of parks maintained by each different Delhi municipality.

² AMRUT guideline: <http://amrut.gov.in/writereaddata/AMRUT%20Guidelines%20.pdf>

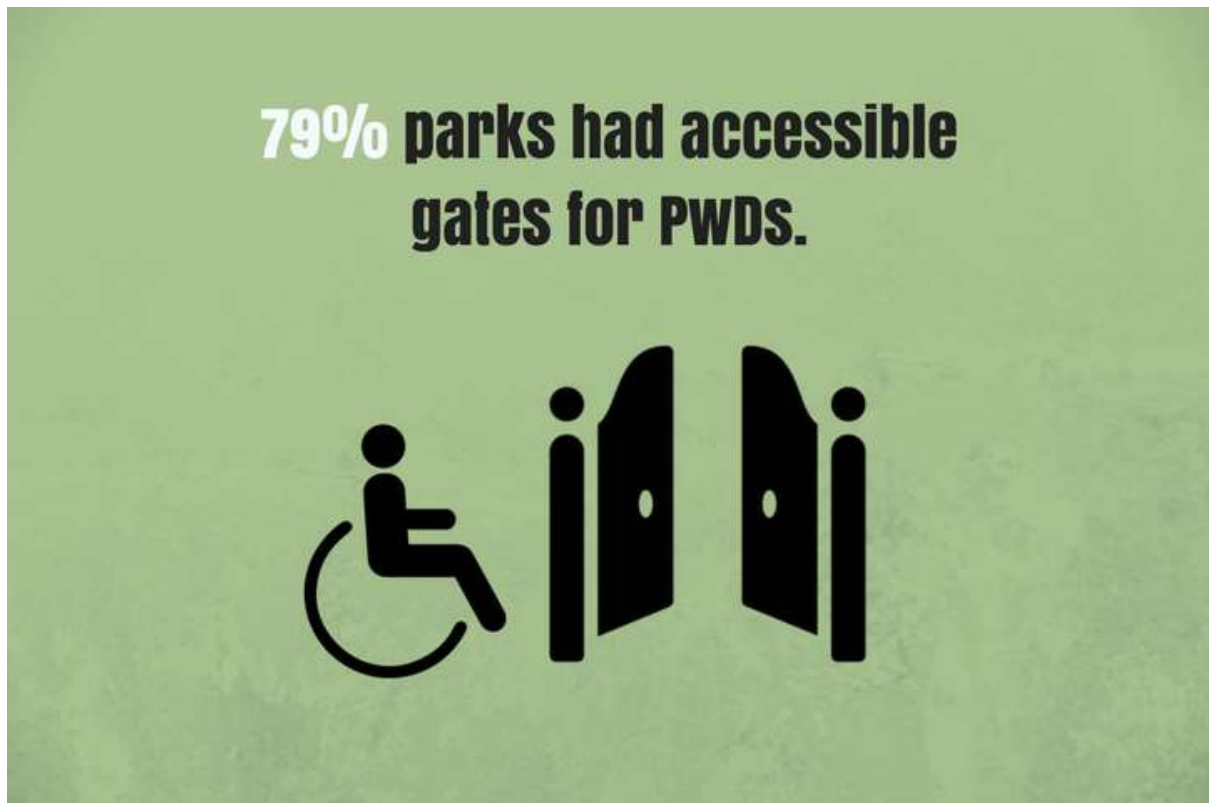


Figure 1: 80% parks had accessible gates for PwDs

Findings from the Primary Survey

The findings of this survey are divided into three sections:

1. Accessibility
2. Basic Facilities and Amenities
3. Security

1. Accessibility

In terms of accessibility, 79 per cent of the parks surveyed had accessible gates for persons with disabilities, with 69 per cent having facilities such as ramps for easy access and convenience. 96 per cent of the parks had functional benches, chairs or seats. The data also show that more than 80 per cent of tracks or trails are well-maintained. However, having convenient access, facilities and trail doesn't necessarily mean that the parks are functional and safe, as you can observe in the following sections.

31% parks didn't have ramps or other facilities for PwDs.



Figure 2: 31% parks didn't have ramps or other facilities for PwDs



96% parks had functional seats, benches and chairs.

Figure 3: 96% parks had functional seats, benches and chairs.

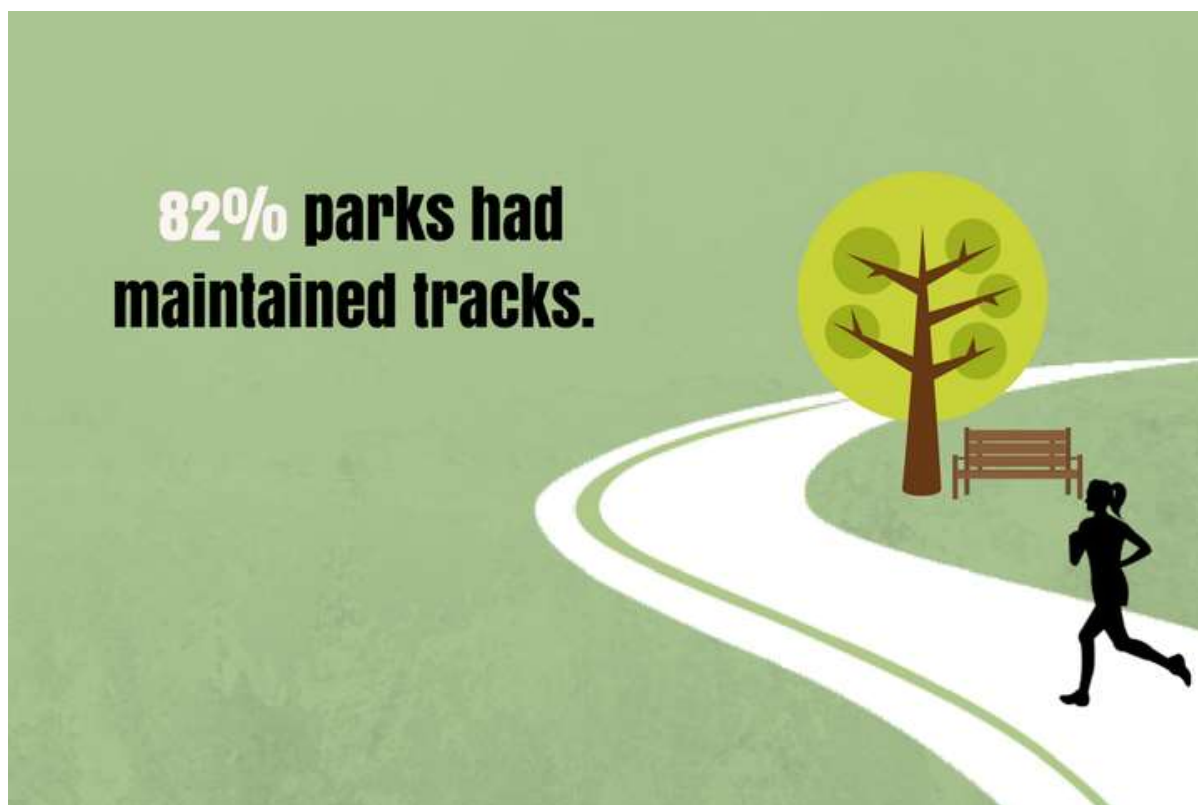


Figure 4: 82% parks had maintained tracks

2. Basic Facilities and Amenities

The survey depicted a rather disappointing picture of basic facilities and amenities in public parks. Out of the 71 public parks surveyed, only 11 had toilets for men, of which 10 had separate toilets for women. Not a single toilet for transgender people was found. Only one toilet had facilities for PwDs.

Even worse, the available toilets were far from usable or clean. Out of the 11 toilets available, only 4 were clean with water and hygienic provisions. Only 8 parks (11 per cent) had drinking water facilities.

Less than half of the public parks (44 per cent) surveyed had recreational facilities for children while 38 parks (54 per cent) didn't have adequate number of dustbins or trash cans.



Figure 5: Toilet figures - 85% parks did not have toilets, 10 had separate toilets for women. None for transgender people and only one park had toilets for PWDs

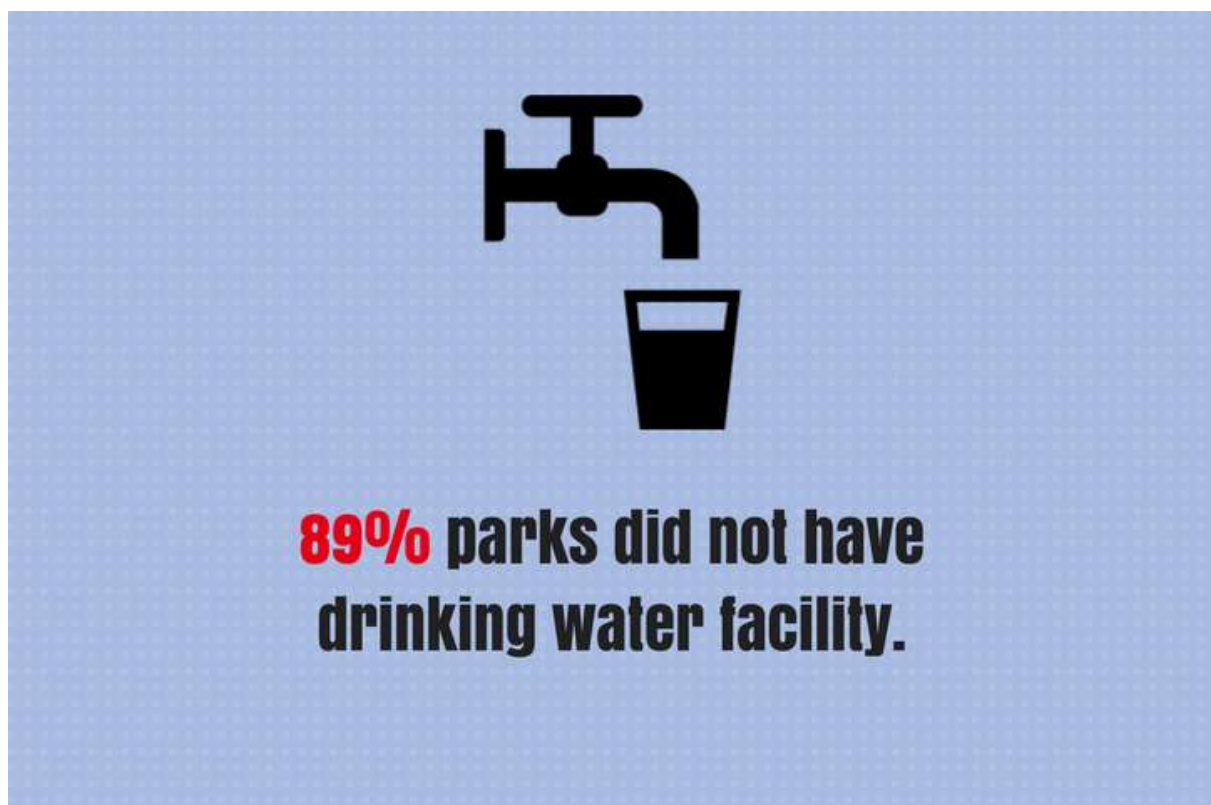


Figure 6: 89% parks did not have drinking water facility.

Less than 50% parks had dustbins.



Figure 7: Less than 50% parks had dustbins.

**only 51% of the
parks were clean.**



Figure 8: Only 51% of the parks were clean.



Figure 9: Only 44% parks had facilities for children.

3. Safety and Security

More than 3 in 5 public parks in Delhi are not safe for women especially at night as they neither have security guards nor CCTV cameras. Only 3 parks had CCTV cameras

The survey revealed that there was no security guard in 46 parks (65 per cent). The parks which had security guards (25 parks) also didn't appear safer, especially for women, as during the survey some security guards were found to be drunk, often gambling and even passing comments to women and girls visiting the park.

Conversations with park goers, local residents and security personnel guarding the parks revealed that 62 per cent of parks (44) become almost inaccessible to women at dark as many of them were closed while others got occupied by alcoholics, drug addicts and other miscreants.



Figure 10: Only 3 parks had CCTV cameras.

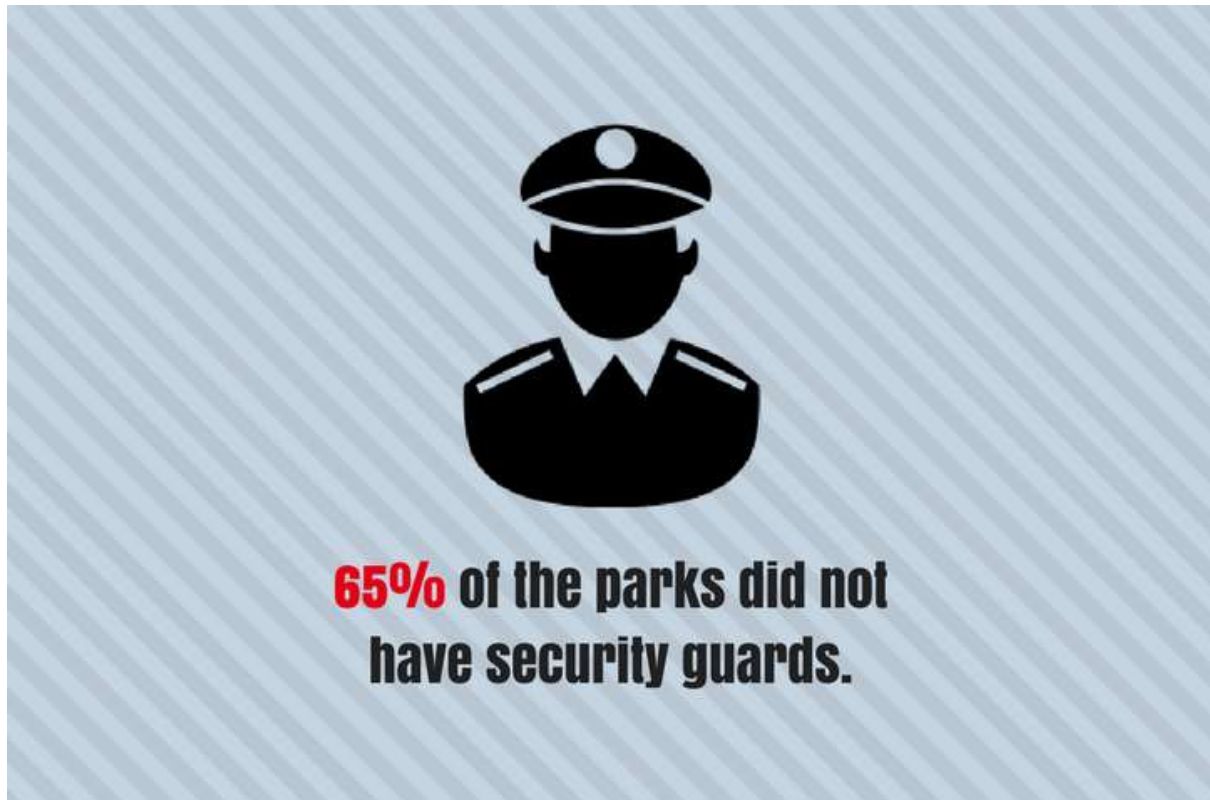


Figure 11: 65% of the parks did not have security guards.

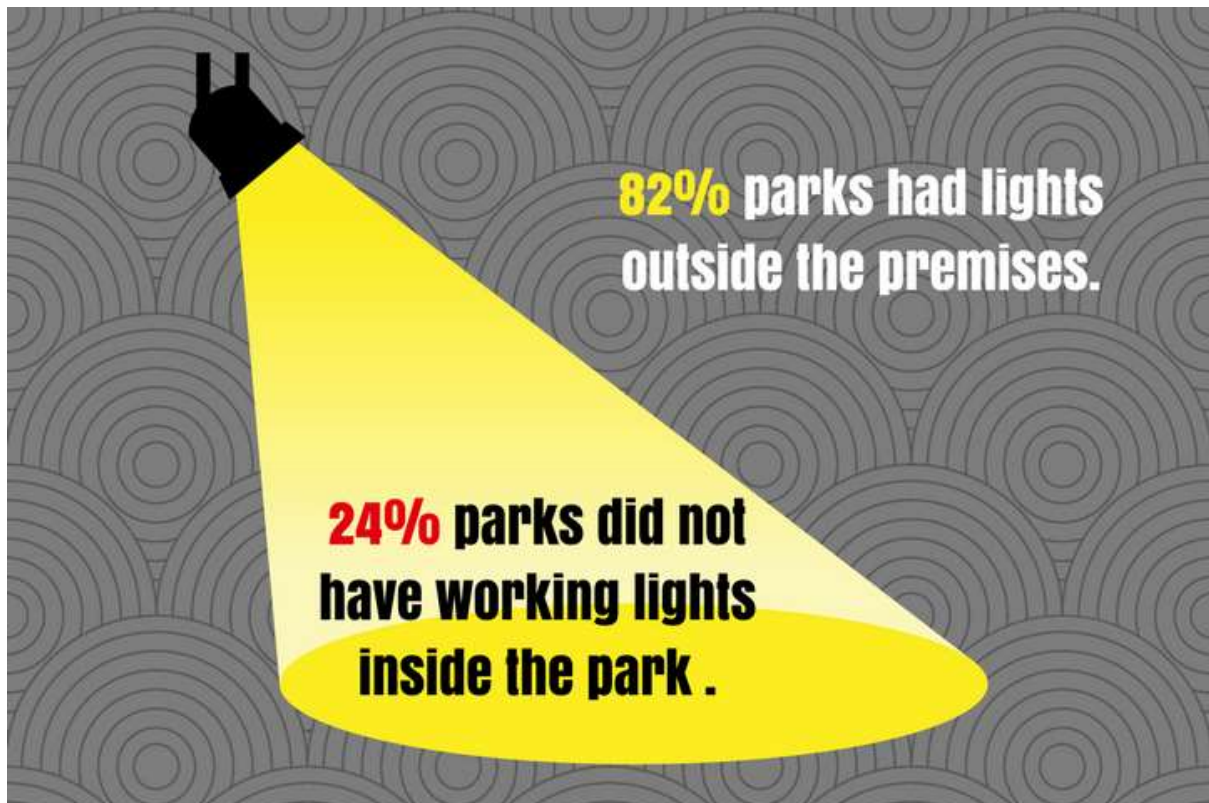


Figure 12: 25% of the parks did not have working lights inside the park; 82% parks had lights outside the park premises.



Figure 13: Almost 70% parks were inaccessible to women at night.

Observations from the field

Park security is a major cause for concern. As already established in the findings, 65% of the parks didn't have security guards but that doesn't mean that parks that did have security guards are safe and secure. Our surveyors found that in some parks, the security guards drink and play cards. Sometimes, they would pass lewd comments to women in the park making it uncomfortable and insecure for women to be in the park premises. Perhaps, the most shocking revelation was when some of our surveyors went to a police station to get access to a nearby park. They were told not to go as there are thieves roaming inside the park and that they might get robbed. This makes us question whether it is not the police's responsibility to provide security to the public even in public places.

Park cleanliness is also one of the main issues our surveyors noticed. In many of the parks there were trash and garbage thrown either all over the park or concentrated at particular areas inside the park. People, including children from poorer communities, urinate and defecate on the grass inside the park making it unhygienic and uncomfortable for others to relax or exercises in the park. Lack of toilet facilities in the park may be blamed for this, which is also a major concern in public parks in Delhi.

As already stated in the findings, almost 90% of the parks surveyed didn't have toilets. On the other hand, parks with toilets didn't have separate toilets for women and PWDs. In some parks, the same problem such as leakage from water tanks has been continuing for the last 10 years and has never been once repaired. Very few parks had functional toilets including bio-toilets and water facilities.

Most parks have facilities for children but maintenance is an issue to be taken care of. Facilities such as swings and see-saw are either rusty, damaged or corroded. Surveyors found out that a 4 year old girl had died in one of the surveyed parks when a damaged swing fell on her just a few days after the survey.

In some parks, the same problem such as leakage from water tanks has been continuing for the last 10 years and has never been once repaired.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As shown by the survey's findings, there are a number of positive features as well as negative features which are highlighted. In terms of physical accessibility, most of the parks are accessible to everyone including PwDs. However, we still have a long way to go if we are to include transgender people while defining 'inclusive' access of public parks. The findings clearly suggest that the current infrastructure of public parks are not transgender friendly. Initiatives such the '**Gender Park**' (park for transgender people) in Kozhikode, Kerala in a welcome initiative towards promoting gender equality and inclusiveness.

Meanwhile lack of basic amenities, facilities, hygiene, infrastructure maintenance and most importantly security means most parks barely functions as it should - facilitating community interaction and development, bringing closer the experience of nature or making diversity flourish.

It is also important to note that these issues are disproportionately skewed against women and transgender people, as well as PwDs. Enactment of changes to Delhi's open spaces must always be with accessibility for all in mind, regardless of gender, age and ability. Outlined below are recommendations to make parks safer, as well as making parks better accessible by everyone:

Making parks safer

Authority needs to understanding "Safety" not only from "accident" aspect but from criminal acts. There is a huge gap in addressing crimes resulting lack of safety for women, children, old person, PWDs while accessing city parks. Following are some key recommendations,

- CCTV cameras installed both inside and outside at all public park premises.
- Professionally trained security guards posted at all public parks who can strictly implement basic park rules while creating a secure environment.
- Immediate complain mechanism around the premises for any kind of criminal cases, special provision for women, PWD, transgender and children
- Sufficient lightings installed inside and outside the park premises.

Initiatives such the ‘Gender Park’ (park for transgender people) in Kozhikode, Kerala in a welcome initiative towards promoting gender equality and inclusiveness.

Making parks better accessible by everyone:

- Separate and functional toilets for men, women, PwDs and transgender people constructed and properly maintained.
- Clean and safe drinking water to be made available.
- Installation of PwD friendly entries such as ramps, tactile markers for the blind etc.
- Periodic maintenance checks, repair and replacement of park infrastructure should be carried out in all major and minor public parks.

Children Park,
Lado Sarai



Annexures

Survey Format

Name of the Park:_____

Location/Area in details (Municipality North Delhi, South Delhi, East Delhi, NDMC):

Park managed by:_____

1. Accessibility

1.1. Is the entrance gate accessible to PWDs?

☐ Yes

☐ No

1.2. Are there any facilities for PWDs like Ramps?

☐ Yes

☐ No

1.3. Do the park have functional benches/seats/chairs?

☐ Yes

☐ No

1.4. What is the condition of the trails?

☐ Well maintained

☐ Broken

1.5. Any other Observations.

2. Basic Facilities and Amenities:

2.1. WASHROOMS

	2.1.a.MEN	2.1.b.WOMEN	2.1.c.TRANSGENDRES	2.1.d.PWD's
YES				
NO				

2.2. Are the washrooms clean?

☒ Yes

☐ No

2.3. Is there availability of soap and water in the washrooms?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.4. Do all toilets have a door?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.5. Is there a facility for drinking water?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.6. Is the water safe to drink?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.7. Do the park have required number of dustbins?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.8. Is the park clean and green?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.9. Are there any facilities available for the children?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2.10. Adaptive Nature Trails

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Security and Safety

3.1 CCTV

3.1.a. CCTV	YES	NO
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3.1.b WORKING	YES	NO
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3.2 Lighting

3.2.a. LIGHT OUTSIDE	YES	NO
3.2.b.LIGHT INSIDE	YES	NO
3.2.c.WORKING(OUTSIDE)	YES	NO
3.2.d.WORKING(INSIDE)	YES	NO

3.3. Are there any security personal/Is the park guided?

☐Yes

☐No

3.4. How far is the nearest police station? _____.

3.5. Can women access the park at night?

☐Yes

☐ No

Survey Link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/766XGDB>

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