Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti

DELIHI, INDIA

Located in the heart of New Delhi, adjacent to Humayun’s Tomb complex and Sunder Nursery, Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti is named after the revered saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, who lived here in the early fourteenth century. A settlement developed at this location during the saint’s lifetime and it has been continuously inhabited.

Following the successful restoration of Humayun’s Tomb Garden in 2004, the urban renewal project commenced with the signature of a public-private partnership ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ on 11 July 2007. The non-profit partnership includes the Archaeological Survey of India, the Central Public Works Department, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC).

Nizamuddin Basti comprises a resident population of approximately 20,000. A synergistic, community centred and collaborative approach has been adopted to improve the quality of life for residents through a series of multi-input projects that aims to improve the urban environment, conserve monuments, develop public parks, strengthen basic services through interventions in the three core areas of health, education and environmental sanitation and engage community participation through a regular series of cultural activities and performances. In so doing, the project seeks to integrate conservation, socio-economic development and urban and environmental development objectives in consultation with local communities and relevant stakeholders. All programmes commenced following a quality of life assessment study.

In 2009 a physical mapping/survey of the Basti was undertaken to document the area with the intention of planning sensitive urban improvements. The survey has led to the preparation of street improvement plans which will be implemented by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Small public parks are being planned along the western edge of the Basti in areas that are deteriorating and are no longer safe and clean. These spaces will be landscaped to fulfil the needs expressed by the resident community. These parks will bring much needed community space and nodes of civic life back to the area and improve pedestrian circulation through the Basti, and there will be parks earmarked for women, children, cricket, community functions and weddings.

Project Scope / Objectives

The project combines conservation with a major socio-economic development effort that is being implemented through a community-centred, collaborative approach. The objective is to improve environmental conditions and strengthen essential urban services with interventions in the core areas of education, health and sanitation.
A series of initiatives are spurring a cultural revival in the Basti. Here, Chaunsath Khamba (right) is lit up at night during a concert of Qawwali music at the Jashn-e Khusrau festival.

As part of the urban renewal project there is a focus on cultural initiatives. A rich cultural vein, particularly in music and poetry, has existed in the Basti for centuries and drives the lifeblood of the community. This is where Amir Khusrau, musician, poet, scholar, Sufi mystic and spiritual disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, started Qawwali music traditions in the thirteenth century. This tradition continues to this day. The ‘living culture’ of the area is a unique and vibrant blend of secular and interfaith elements that encompass the performing arts, classical music, poetry and traditional crafts.

Improvement in the life of the residents must also include initiatives that embrace the creativity and talent nurtured in this environment and that are core to its identity. Steps are being taken to revive and revitalize these components highlighted at festivals, performances, discussions and through recordings.

In parallel with these procedures health interventions in the Basti include upgrading the MCD Polyclinic to ensure better diagnosis and treatment, reduce referrals and build the capacity of a community health outreach team for preventive health care, as well as the creation of a pathology laboratory. Finally, newly built public toilets – a key intervention for urban renewal in the Basti – have improved access to hygienic sanitation for residents.

Social programmes in conjunction with the AKF have focused on education, training, health and the environment. In the first place the major effort towards primary education improvement has included a refurbishment of the MCD primary school, interventions to improve quality of education through professional development of faculty, improved classroom processes/child centred to teaching-learning process, better school management and strengthened school community approaches interface. Secondly, vocational training programmes for young people include a career development centre (NIIT Institute of Technology), the teaching of the English language (British Council) and training of heritage guides to give tours of the Basti and its history, while learning support to students in the age group of fourteen to sixteen years is given in Maths and English (‘English Access Micro-Scholarship Programme’ co-funded by the US Embassy).

The conservation of monuments and the rehabilitation of open spaces in the Basti aim to restore their intrinsic cultural, historical and spiritual significance. Using state-of-the-art technology, including ground-penetrating radar survey, high-definition 3D laser scanning and geotechnical assessments, conservation started on the fourteenth-century Basti (step-well).

At the eastern edge of the Basti stand two important tombs: the Chaunsath Khamba, a Mughal tomb, and the tomb of Mirza Ghalib, South Asia’s most renowned poet. Together, they form one of the largest open spaces in the Basti. Landscape works at both tombs have enhanced the historic character, restored dignity to these monuments and provided much needed community gathering spaces in this dense setting.

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Making the most of the cultural revival, a poetic reading is held at a community centre, a tradition that goes back to the time of Amir Khusrau.
Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE
Ghulam-ul-din Balban, Sultan of Delhi in the 13th-century, built the palace of Lal Mahal in what is now Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. In the early 14th century, the revered saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, lived and was also buried there, initiating seven centuries of tomb building in the area. During the building of New Delhi, the agricultural lands attached to the Basti were acquired and the area declared an urban village. The area was declared a conservation area in the 2021 Master Plan of Delhi.

PROJECT RISKS

Challenges

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS
Rapid physical densification and population growth put enormous strain on the infrastructure at Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti, especially in terms of environmental sanitation and waste management. Frequent flooding and blockages in sewage lines are common and provide public health concerns.

INFRASTRUCTURE
Water supply and sewage disposal systems are present but will be required. Access and sanitation are widespread.

BUILDING CONDITIONS
In Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti limited living space per family, poor ventilation from densification, inadequate sewage and water connections compounded by large numbers of pilgrims have increased the dependence on public utilities and building blocks.

DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS
Several monuments dating from the 12th-century on-nallah are widespread. Two public open spaces were signed with Delhi Development Authority and Delhi Government’s Public Works Department to allow land- scaping of parks and nallah respectively.

Phasing 2007 – 2011

Memorandum of Understanding/ signed between: AKTC, the Delhi Development Authority and Delhi Government’s Public Works Department

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

Memorandum of Understanding/ signed between: AKTC, the Delhi Development Authority and Delhi Corporation of Delhi School completed

Two public open spaces are in the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti fully rehabilitated

PUBLIC PARTNERS
Archaeological Survey of India, Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority.

Donors
Ford Foundation, German Embassy, United States Embassy, Canadian International Development Agency.

Authoritative Framework
Memorandum of Understanding signed on 7 July 2007.

In 2009 additional ‘Memorandums of Understanding’ were signed with Delhi Development Authority and Delhi Government’s Public Works Department to allow landscaping of parks and nallah respectively.

DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS

Multiple physical mapping of the project area, documentation of the monuments and socioeconomic surveys, which needed to be managed sequentially by senior project staff to explain objectives. The physical surveys in the community were met with repeated resistance from the community. They could only be completed in 2009 after establishing confidence building programming in health, education, sanitation and vocational training.

PLANNING ISSUES

With the renovation of open spaces and landscaping of parks coupled with community mobilization, ownership and their involvement in management of these spaces, it is hoped that children, women and residents in Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti will be able to safely access these spaces. The project has incorporated interventions such as connecting householders to sewer lines and there are plans to improve housing stocks in need of repair, especially those surrounding significant monuments and public spaces such as the Basti and the nallah respectively.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS

Several monuments dating from the 13th-century onwards are located within Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. Conservation works to date in the Basti have focused on a 13th-century step-well or baoli that partially collapsed in July 2006 and on the conservation and landscaping of the tomb of the famous poet Mirza Ghalib. In 2011, conservation works will continue on the baoli and will extend to the 18th-century structures known as Chuna Mahal and Aligh Khan’s Tomb.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

With only 27% of youth having completed senior secondary education, the vocational training programmes being implemented are designed for improving employability.

MARKET LINKAGES

One block of community toilets has now been built and is in operation. Work on an additional, much larger toilet block is planned to commence in 2017.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/PROGRAMME

The project has begun to strengthen civil society, based on consultative planning and implementation, as well as the formation of internal and user groups. Self-help groups have been established and community management of public facilities such as toilets has commenced.

PROJECT RISKS

The project continues to implement interventions to improve health care, including both dress health issues of the elderly and the disabled.

The Basti’s narrow streets are host to high shops and markets.