



The City Hall and Sudagun as seen from Maha Bandula Park

GREEN SPACES IN YANGON: Towards a Greener City for All

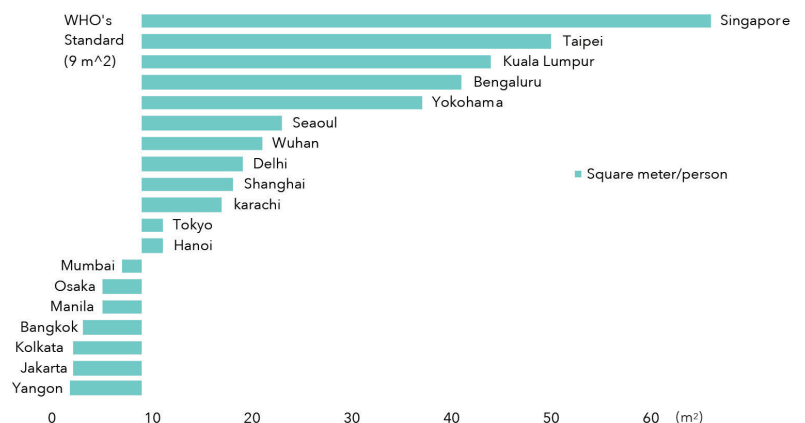
In Yangon City, the amount of green spaces per person has been falling sharply - the amount of green space per person has declined by 40% during 25 years. As population and economy grows, this trend will get worse, unless proper consideration for green spaces is taken. This paper tries to understand the challenges related to green spaces, identifying evidence-based policy recommendations on how to overcome them. It recognizes the challenges in delivering change on the ground, and recommends the development of an overarching strategy, alongside a focus on public participation, to drive smaller, local improvements:

- A Green Space Strategy should be developed: this would guide long term planning for new parks and improved access to existing parks.
- Improve urban planning through more effective collaboration among YCDC agencies and departments. This would improve urban green space planning and better meet the needs of the residents.
- Inclusive public participation should be practiced: Public participation in urban planning strengthens democracy, helps to resolve conflicts between the public and government, and increases public confidence in public institutions.

Green Spaces play a key role in the quality of urban communities in cities. Benefits ranges from the health and well-being of individuals and their relationship with nature, to the regulation of climate impacts, branding, economic development, tourism, character and culture of a city. However, green spaces in Yangon City have been facing challenges.

This paper tries to understand these challenges related to green spaces, identifying evidence-based policy recommendations on how to overcome these challenges.

Green spaces in Asian major cities



Source: Asian Green City Index

Yangon's green spaces under threat...

Green space in Yangon has been shrinking due to growing population, economic growth, and rapid urbanization. The amount of green space per person has declined by 40% during 25 years. In 1990, Yangon City had over 30 square feet of green space for every resident, but this has already reduced to four square feet in 2014. The World Health Organization recommends that a city should have about 100 square feet per person.

Population growth is a key driver. The population has nearly doubled from 2.9 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 2014, and it is predicted it will be about seven million in 2024. Therefore, green space per person will reduce further, without action to increase the amount of green space in the city.

Meanwhile, the number of parks in Yangon City already fails to meet the needs of park users. There are in total 63 parks covering 522 acres, which equates to 4.4 square feet of green spaces per person.

In addition, the distribution of parks is unequal with almost half of the total number of parks located in the Central Business District and Inner Urban City Zone. There are seven townships that have one public park, and nine townships - Latha, Lanmadaw, Tarmwe, Seikkan, Dawbon, Hlaing, Hlaing Thar Yar, Shwe Pyi Thar and Dagon Seikkan townships - have no park.

According to Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), there were more than one million park visitors per month in September and October 2018. This demonstrates the high demand for green space among the public.

Moreover, a number of private companies have had green spaces handed over to them, including major development in parks such as Kanthaya Park and Mya Kyun Tha Park. For example: in 2013 and 2015, the 44.5-acre Mya Kyun Tha Park and 10-acre Kanthaya Park were granted for commercial construction projects.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **An overarching Green Space Strategy should be developed:**
- **Improve urban planning through more effective collaboration among YCDC agencies and departments:**
- **Inclusive public participation should be practiced:**

There is a growing recognition of the importance of green space. The YCDC Playgrounds, Parks and Gardens Department has a goal to have a playground in each ward and a park in every township. The Yangon Heritage Trust has set out a wide range of recommendations to protect and extend public parks. The challenge is making change happen on the ground. We recommend combining a city-wide strategy, with smaller practical improvements, driven through public participation.

■ **An overarching Green Space Strategy should be developed:**

A green space strategy is an important tool for urban parkland and planning, and is a plan that guides long term planning for new parks and improved access to existing parks. Hence, a green space strategy should commit that existing green space is protected and remains open to the public; mandating that all new development includes the World Health Organization (WHO) green space coverage ration; seeking out opportunities to increase green space, particularly in areas where there is little or no park space. In developing the strategy, it should include a collective vision of the needs and priorities of residents and the meaning, value and importance of urban green space to a city.

■ **Improve urban planning through more effective collaboration among YCDC agencies and departments:**

Local coordination and collaboration is a pressing challenge in municipal governance in Yangon as there are many different departments at the township level, as well as numerous committees with a lack of clear

mandates. Therefore, effective collaboration among agencies and departments should be enhanced and a clear delimitation of roles and a definition of responsibility among agencies should be developed, to improve urban green space planning and better meet the needs of the residents.

■ **Inclusive public participation should be practiced:**

Civil engagement and public voices are not sufficiently heard in urban green space planning and development in Yangon. Public participation in urban planning strengthens democracy by helping to resolve conflict between the public and government, and increases public confidence in public institutions. Therefore, inclusive public participation should be practiced in all Yangon City urban planning projects, ensuring that the voices of all community members are captured regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, class, or any other social categorization. Meanwhile, public participation should be improved through workshops, meetings, community gatherings, forums and assembly. Multiple communication channels should also be used as a means to increase public awareness including radio, print media (magazines, handbook and flyers), websites, creative performance, and SMS.

Public participation can help to drive change through small, community-led projects, to create green spaces in unloved or deserted urban areas, such as recent back alley transformations. Small actions to improve public parks can be identified through public participation and be implemented at fairly low cost. Such as:

- growing more shady trees
- sports facilities, playgrounds and simple exercise machines,
- trash bins, lighting, seating
- the removal of access fees for park facilities such as public toilets.
- Holding community events

References

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