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SNAPSHOT

Historic Kabul Garden is Restored

Afghanistan's public spaces are being greened and brought back to life by USAID for local communities to use and enjoy



The local football club plays a friendly match on the newly laid pitch in Baghe Qazi

When preliminary restoration work began in 2009, the garden was a wreck. Temporary grain silos were dotted around and the rest was used as a rubbish dump by the community and the authorities

Hundreds of skilled Afghan craftsmen have helped bring an historic, 300-year-old garden in the heart of Afghanistan's capital vibrantly to life. Baghe Qazi or Judges Garden, which once sprawled green and verdant across 3.5 hectares in the older part of Kabul, suffered badly during the conflict of the early 1990s. The garden celebrates the contribution to public life of a prominent Herat judge, Qazi Fayzollah Khan Dawlatshahi. The Qazi, who tutored Prince Timur before he became king, moved with the court to Kabul when Timur Shah shifted his capital from Kandahar. The Qazi went on to become one of the King's most trusted advisers.

But the garden's historic significance could not guarantee its safety during the conflict-ridden 1990s. When USAID, in partnership with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, started preliminary restoration work in 2009, the garden was a wreck. Temporary grain silos were dotted around and the rest was used as a rubbish dump by the community and the authorities.

The incremental process of restoration included support for the relocation of traders, the demolition of temporary structures, removal of the rubbish and construction debris and preparing the ground for planting and landscaping. The garden's boundary wall was rebuilt and pretty paved paths and drainage channels laid down. Trained gardeners replanted the Baghe Qazi with hardy trees such as mulberry, eglantine, poplar and oleaster and plants that can thrive in rocky, polluted soil. Family recreation areas and a large sports field were incorporated in the garden so that it can serve as a place of pleasure and calm for disparate groups of people, including the local youth soccer and cricket teams.

Today, the restored garden has come vibrantly back to life as an extraordinary example of USAID's effort to ensure that public spaces across the country are greened and beautified for local communities to use and enjoy.