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INTEGRITY

**COMMUNITIES OF TOMORROW: BUILDING A
VALUES-BASED CHILDREN FRIENDLY COMMUNITY**

COMMUNITIES OF TOMORROW: BUILDING A VALUES-BASED CHILDREN FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

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Inclusivity in policy-making and ensuring its positive impact on the mass population is always challenging for global leaders. Strategizing every policy-making initiative with the baseline of integrity by focusing on people, from childhood to the retirement, will be beneficial. We can consider reflecting their values and virtues into actions. Now, global leaders need to align all policies by considering all stakeholders, including children, and by considering future sustainable development for the entire planet, including child-friendly communities.

Global challenge

From the dark ages to the bright-shiny era, nobody will deny values like honesty and integrity, regardless of personal will and passion. But everybody wishes to drive their journey safely and soundly, with authentic roots and viable derivatives.

We need to consider children first. Children and youth are the most important stakeholders for sustainability, ensuring stability and further progress with integrated growth programs for any country. The Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Saudi Arabia: HRH Mohammad Bin Salman, explicitly noted, "Our youth are conscious, cultured and creative with high values." (Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics 2020). These words encapsulate expectations of Saudi leadership about Saudi youth's contribution to the Saudi 2030 vision.

By 2100, the global population of children will be about 1.9 billion (Statista 2021).

According to the UN Department of

Environmental and Social Affairs (DESA) Population Division, G20 member countries are home to more than 70 percent of the world's older population. Their forecast says the +65 age group will be 705 million by 2030, and will approach 1 billion by 2050 (UN DESA 2019).

On the other hand, if we take Saudi Arabia as an example, according to the General Authority of Statistics, Saudi Arabia, Population Estimates %67 :2020 of the Saudi population are children and youth. Moreover, out of the total population of Saudi Arabia, %30.3 are from age 0-36.7% ,14- from age 15-34-, and %33.0 in the +35 age group. Therefore, two-thirds of the total population, those 0-14- and those 15-34-, are key stakeholders for any sustainable development and initiatives.

There are several reasons why we need to prioritize children and youth in our policies, i.e. to:

- Ensure equal rights for them;
- Confirm their healthy development;
- Create a solid basis for their independence;
- Provide them the pathway for the life-enhancing journey by overcoming economic, social, environmental obstacles;
- Mitigate all possible losses or negative impacts caused by mega decisions/ projects/ initiatives/ actions;
- Let them have their voices in all stakeholders' roles; and,
- Count and include their cost of prosperity and its implications before all policy-making initiatives.

That is why UNICEF has rightly started child-friendly city initiatives globally, based on a framework for action that includes a participatory process involving all concerned stakeholders – local authorities, civil society, experts, communities, and, especially, children (UNICEF n.d.; UNICEF 2004).

Therefore, this is a challenge for the global leaders to address children, their affairs, and their impact through policies which will ultimately ensure and enhance their integrity.

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Global solution

For the sake of comprehensive values adaptation, and putting those values into action, we need to consider various community initiatives, such as the following:

- Consider child and youth participation in all values-centric policies and procedural work within the community;
- Conduct programs that strengthen social inclusion for the communities;
- Prioritize impact on children and their values in all local decision-making;
- Establish practical tools to support child-friendly city concepts;
- Build capacity of all human resources to consider the values of all stakeholders, including children, and nurture their reflection in policy implementation; and,
- Promote a holistic approach to sustainability where a safer and value-based community will plug in with the overall country's values and culture.

These initiatives will not succeed unless and until we engage and listen to the voices of relevant stakeholders together, including:

- Local government;
- Children and families;
- Civil society organizations or opinion leaders; and,
- Local businesses.

Global projects like health/survival, education/skills, environment, protection, inclusion, innovation, play/leisure, and migration affairs address specific challenges and create opportunities for children in urban areas. In addition, there are key strategies that can pursue child-friendly city initiatives and make them successful. These include law and policies, advocacy and awareness-raising, city-wide strategic plans, budget allocation, child/youth participation, coordination, partnership, collecting data, and monitoring progress.

In countries like Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France,

Germany, Guinea, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mongolia, Mozambique, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Vietnam, global vibes have already been created. Now, all global leaders must align in acknowledging the importance of inclusion of children and their perspective in all policy-making.

Case Study: Italy

The “Città amiche dei bambini” (Child-Friendly City) initiative in Italy was launched in 1996 and led by the Italian National Committee for UNICEF. Collaboration with cities is a vital advocacy activity to promote child rights at the local level. A general review of the program was launched in 2017 to better comply with UNICEF's international guidelines.

Italian municipalities play a crucial role in improving children's living conditions. The National Committee supports cities in developing action plans on child well-being and promotes policies based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Italian National Committee ensured that the “9 building blocks” declared at the national level align with UNICEF's international approach. Starting from this premise, the National Committee elaborated guidance materials on building a child-friendly city, valid both for the training of volunteers and for facilitating the presentation of the program in meetings with local institutions interested in starting the journey. (UNICEF, n.d.)

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Case Study: Saudi Arabia

As a best practice in policy initiatives, we can take an example from Saudi Arabia's Quality-of-Life Program. As a part of the Saudi 2030 vision, the government of Saudi Arabia endeavors to improve individual's and families' quality of life by creating the necessary environment to develop and support new livability and lifestyle options. These options will bolster citizens, residents, and visitors in cultural, entertainment, sports, tourism, urban activities, and other related activities that nurture their quality of life. In addition, such diverse options will have their own economic and social impact by creating jobs, diversifying economic activity, and boosting Saudi cities' rankings among the world's top livable towns. Now is the time for them to align these key stakeholders to ensure the actual values for the action phase. Therefore, let us not forget the critical stakeholders: children, who will be the ultimate driving force for embracing and nurturing a values-based society. (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia n.d.)

While considering children's perspectives, there are a few fundamental touch points that reflect policy integrity:

- Community
- Voice
- Family
- Basic needs
- Environment
- Safety
- Security
- Equality

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure enough space with a natural environment that allows their natural growth.

Leaders have advocated for the precise values that were important to children and youth and persuaded others of the need to support their

views — e.g., wanting places to be greener, children to be able to enjoy their childhood, and the community to be cohesive and friendly (Peacock, Anderson and Crivellaro 2018). From family through education, values need to be identified and nurtured properly. As a result, these values can be reflected in communities. Therefore, to establish a value-based community that will ultimately impact national values and culture with the ultimate consequence of global reflection, we need to consider how children can grow their talents.

“Rural areas are safe places for children to grow up in...and are appreciated for being socially inclusive, friendly, and relaxed” (Haartsen and Stockdale, 2018). Ensuring equality is always a daunting task for decision-makers, especially between rural and urban areas. Inequality creates division and dissatisfaction among the population. Therefore, we need to ensure that all policy-makers give enough attention to children's values whether they are from rural or urban areas. It is essential to listen to children's voices, confirm their equal participation, fulfill their basic needs, and allow their families to practice all values with comfort and a favorable environment.

Learning through explorations of nature and planting can build and expand children's relationships at school and in the community (Adams et al 2019). Other research topics could be related to a nature-friendly attitude to implement in children's daily lives (Kim et al 2020). Of course, that means considering children's affairs, valuing their values, and establishing a day-to-day practice is not so easy, but we need to start somewhere.

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Case Study: Saudi Arabia

There are many initiatives developing in Saudi Arabia. The government has planned the next stage of the Quality-of-Life Program under the Saudi 2030 vision, to continue its efforts to empower the sectors of culture, heritage, sports, entertainment, and tourism. This program will soon launch the Hobbies sector, its regulations, club licensing, and full support to its sustainability and success as an essential lever in increasing quality of life. Such initiatives will help focus efforts on quality of life and secure a high living standard for Saudi Arabia's residents and visitors. (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2019)

Similarly, in the global context, we will find many initiatives that have been taken, started and ended, or started and stuck. However, to ensure the ultimate result, we need a comprehensive program, based on facts, before any policy drafting and implementation. Also, we need to remember that the development will not happen if it remains within the public sector domain. We need to enhance it in all aspects of the socio-economic sphere by including private sector actors in developing the necessary policies and regulations to facilitate their investment and ensure their continuous development and sustainability in embracing a collective approach.

Finally, we would like to urge global leaders to focus on a value-based children-friendly community approach with the following factors:

- Ensuring children's participation as a stakeholder;
- Developing a child-friendly policy framework;
- Establishing city-wide children's development strategy;
- Connecting children's affairs coordination mechanism with central strategy;
- Conducting child impact assessment and evaluation;
- Allocating children's budget;
- Generating city-based reporting on children;

- Building awareness of children's rights; and,
- Creating a self-advocacy mode for children with their voices.

Once our policy-makers consider the above factors, we will approach a solution to overcome non-accumulating and non-integrated but crucial stakeholder (children)'s negligence.

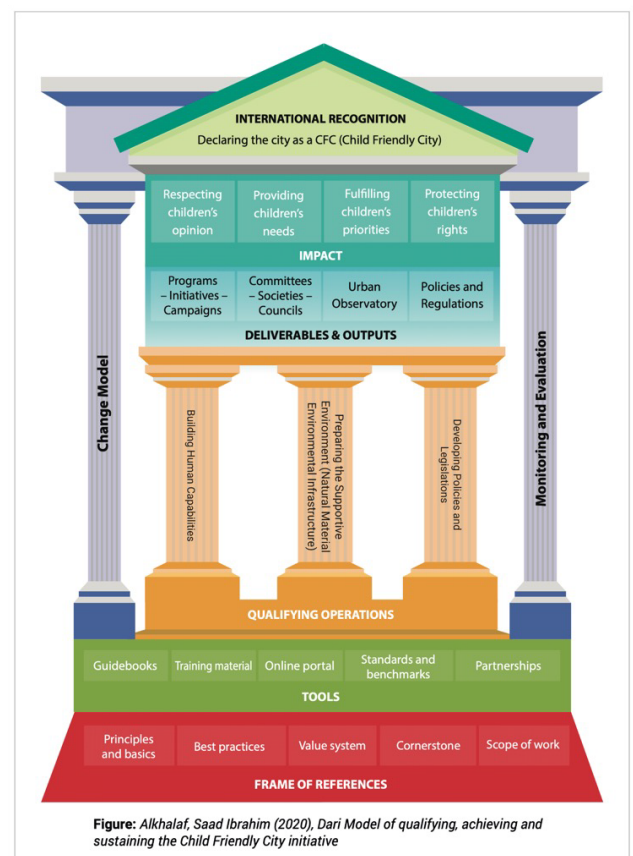


Figure: Alkhalaf, Saad Ibrahim (2020), Dari Model of qualifying, achieving and sustaining the Child Friendly City initiative

The above model illustrates that one objective is to qualify, achieve and sustain the Child-Friendly City (CFC) initiative by using a set of tools to achieve deliverables and outputs to create impact to fulfill the target of acquiring International Recognition as a Child Friendly City (Alkhalaf, Saad 2020).

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Policy recommendations

In the coming years, we need to address how to ensure the core values of children that they expect to be functioning within the community, and therefore to express and align our integrity in action, while considering the following policy areas:

- Provide policy-oriented proposals for a sustainable and more equitable future;
- Make institutions capable of creating a robust response while dealing with policies;
- Develop 'new normal' technology-based communication mechanisms with more openness and transparency to ensure the fulfillment of the rights for everybody with essential services;
- Improve the resilience of integration systems with policies and improving access for all stakeholders;
- Adopt a comprehensive social impact-based approach while initiating any policies and legislations; and,
- Incorporate analysis of sectoral inequalities, skills inequalities, and gender inequalities into the analyses for a new financial architecture.

Once we address these, we can initiate values-based policies to establish a child-friendly community. We also need a few model communities to set the benchmark for comprehensive implementation and create vibes for G20 countries.

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