

24th session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written inputs by Saudi Green Building Forum

Agenda Item 8: Strategies for changing mindsets in the public sector; retaining talent and attracting younger workers

From Aspiration to Occupation: Saudi Green Building Forum's saaf® Framework for Empowering Arab Youth through Green Jobs and Institutional Innovation

The Saudi Green Building Forum (SGBF) was founded to serve as a civil society platform capable of advancing environmental transformation in the built environment through an inclusive, culturally grounded, and results-oriented lens. As the sole owner of the Sustainability Assessment Accreditation Framework—saaf®—Saudi Green Building Forum leads a regional response to global sustainability goals, promoting excellence in green building without outsourcing expertise or vision.

Our mission transcends environmental compliance. It is about localizing leadership, developing future-facing skills, and aligning institutional practices with youth potential. This position paper presents how saaf® contributes to institutional reform in the Arab region—specifically, by changing mindsets in the public sector and creating dignified, future-ready work for the next generation.

Context: The Arab Youth Dilemma – Vision, Yet Underutilized

Arab youth are not disengaged—they are underserved. Across the region, young people are driving microenterprises in food services, mobile retail, and digital design. In Saudi Arabia, food trucks have become a symbol of youth entrepreneurship, with hundreds of licensed operations led by men and women under 30. These initiatives are proof of readiness, not resistance. Youth want to lead; they are simply doing so outside of institutions that do not yet accommodate their energy or imagination.

Saudi Green Building Forum believes this is a policy gap—not a generation gap. The public sector must adapt its systems to recognize localized skills, offer green career mobility, and partner with community-based accreditation frameworks like saaf® that are rooted in national development goals.

Youth Disinterest in Government Careers: A Crisis of Structure, Not Spirit

Arab youth do not reject public service—they reject stagnation. The reality is that traditional employment structures, especially within public institutions, are misaligned with the aspirations of a generation raised on agility, collaboration, and visible impact. Lengthy job hierarchies, fixed roles, and opaque decision-making are particularly unappealing to youth who are already reshaping economies through pop-up enterprises, social innovation, and environmental start-ups.

What is needed is an enabling interface between the green economy and public institutions—a framework that allows for mobility, purpose, and recognition. saaf® offers such an interface.

The saaf® Response: Creating Career Pathways Through Green Systems Thinking

saaf® is not just a building certification tool—it is a workforce development mechanism. Built by and for the Arab region, it translates sustainability principles into localized procedures, job functions, and community outcomes. saaf® projects generate demand for assessors, data verifiers, water auditors, lifecycle specialists, and community engagement officers—roles not yet formalized in many government departments, but essential for climate action and urban resilience.

Through its technical system and institutional partnerships, saaf® enables:

1. Short-term green work placements in government-led projects (e.g., municipal buildings, parks, transportation systems).
2. Localized training for young professionals, with certification embedded in real-world government projects.
3. Pathways for independent youth consultants to engage in publicly funded sustainable infrastructure.
4. Recognition of youth-led sustainability initiatives, including community retrofitting, energy education, and circular business design.

All of these open direct channels between youth aspirations and public sector implementation—without requiring complete structural overhaul.

Cultural Legitimacy: What Makes saaf® Different

Unlike imported certification models, saaf® is grounded in:

- Saudi Vision 2030 and national sustainability regulations.
- Arabic-language delivery and culturally aligned capacity-building.
- Non-governmental governance—which allows for civil society, academic, and private sector integration in public discourse.

- Values-based design, including themes of stewardship, sufficiency, and intergenerational justice.

These traits are not simply aesthetic—they create legitimacy. Youth are more willing to trust and participate in frameworks that respect local identity and reflect their reality. saaf® is not a brand imported to measure change. It is a platform created to activate local change-makers.

Strategic Impact: Five Ways saaf® Supports Agenda Item 8

1. **Changing Institutional Mindsets:** By embedding sustainability into the daily workflow of public projects, saaf® normalizes youth participation as a technical necessity—not just a symbolic gesture. Young professionals trained in saaf® serve as data collectors, assessors, and innovation leads on certified government projects.
2. **Retaining Talent Through Recognition:** The saaf® credential is not a training certificate—it is a performance-based professional designation. This provides youth with credibility and career mobility both within and outside of government systems.
3. **Unlocking Green Job Creation:** Every saaf®-certified project generates demand for inspection, compliance, documentation, and stakeholder education. Saudi Green Building Forum prioritizes youth inclusion in this value chain by short-listing independent consultants under age 35 for project engagement.
4. **Facilitating Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Saudi Green Building Forum convenes annual forums and policy workshops where youth interface directly with municipal engineers, housing authorities, and international experts—ensuring intergenerational knowledge exchange and upstream influence.
5. **Building Trust in Public Purpose:** By participating in tangible, high-impact, and visible public projects—like water-efficient schools or net-zero clinics—young professionals develop pride in contributing to national progress. This is the foundation of long-term retention.

Recommendations & Aspiration

To further align public sector systems with youth potential, Saudi Green Building Forum recommends the following:

- Institutionalize saaf®-based roles in public hiring frameworks, especially in urban planning, housing, education, and climate offices.
- Fund municipality-youth partnerships using the saaf® criteria as a framework for measurable outcomes.
- Support regional hubs of green excellence in universities that align with saaf®’s accreditation and verification streams.

- Launch a regional Green Fellowship Program under saaf® to place young professionals in year-long assignments within public and community-led projects.
- Create national award recognition programs for youth-led sustainability innovation using saaf® metrics.

Conclusion

We are not calling for the modernization of youth—we are calling for continued modernization of systems to meet youth where they already are: motivated, skilled, and ready to lead. Through the saaf® framework, public institutions can demonstrate trust in their next generation—not through slogans, but through roles, responsibilities, and results.

The question is no longer if Arab youth will lead the green transition. They already are. The question is whether public institutions will adapt their mindset fast enough to support them—not as recipients, but as rightful architects of the future.

The Saudi Green Building Forum, saaf® framework in the space of the United Nations ready to support Member States, municipalities, and civil society in this transition.