

Name: Ayu Adristi Cahyadewi  
Institution: University of Indonesia  
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### **The Urgency of Child-Friendly Community for Children with Disabilities: A Key Pillar of Sustainable Economic Development in Asia-Pacific**

*“The quality of a society can be measured by how far we protect the rights and well-being of children. Creating a child-friendly environment is the best investment for our future.”* - Nelson Mandela.

After reading the quote, I've come to understand the critical importance of safeguarding children's rights and well-being in enhancing the overall quality of a society. This is because a society's quality is indicative of how effectively we protect children's rights and well-being. By creating a child-friendly environment, we're essentially making the best investment for the future. Within the context of Asia Pacific's economic development, the concept of child-friendly communities is closely interlinked with the region's economic objectives.

In the present age of globalization and technological advancements, sustainable economic development has become a desired goal for countries worldwide, especially in the Asia Pacific region. On the path toward comprehensive and sustainable economic growth, the social and humanitarian aspects play a crucial role, particularly in establishing inclusive child-friendly communities for children with disabilities. However, not all children have equal opportunities to reap the benefits of economic growth. Children with disabilities often face challenges of accessibility and discrimination that hinder their development. Therefore, the existence of child-friendly communities, where children with disabilities also have equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, becomes the cornerstone for these children's future.

Consequently, I've chosen to explore the subtheme of Child-Friendliness due to my interest in communities that prioritize shaping children's qualities for the world's future and fostering economic advancement, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. In this context, a child-friendly community refers to an environment that nurtures the growth and development of children by addressing their physical, mental, and emotional needs. The integration of disabilities into development planning ensures that all community members, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education, healthcare, and economic prospects.

An organization that I've explored further related to this concept is UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). UNICEF is an international organization that committed to work with central and local governments to promote Child Friendly Cities and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly on Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities. Also UNESCO's primary goal is to promote international cooperation in the

fields of education, science, culture, and communication. They collaborate with governments and local partners to develop educational programs designed to the unique needs and potentials of each child, including those with disabilities.

The "All Means All" program in the Philippines is one of UNESCO's initiatives to enhance education access and address the needs of children, especially those with disabilities, ensuring they receive sufficient quality education and suitable curricula. This program involves training teachers and education staff using an inclusive and rights-based approach. The goal is to equip teachers to handle diverse student populations in the classroom and provide the necessary support for children with disabilities. This ensures that children with disabilities can engage with curricula that match their needs and potentials.

A crucial aspect of the child-friendliness concept, in my perspective, is involving children in decisions that affect them. Similar to "All Means All" program, it encourages active participation of children in their educational journey. Additionally, this program strives to reshape perceptions and societal attitudes concerning the inclusion of children with disabilities, which includes addressing stigmas and discrimination that often hinder their educational access. By encouraging changes in the education system and societal attitudes, this program aims to eliminate barriers that obstruct children with disabilities from obtaining equitable and high-quality education.

Therefore, the focus on children's rights and well-being is a long-term investment in sustainable development. Children growing up in supportive environments will become catalysts for sustainable economic growth and societal well-being in the Asia Pacific region. By integrating child-friendly values into the objectives of Asia Pacific's economic development, communities can create an environment that supports inclusive and sustainable economic growth, wherein children have optimal access to realizing their potential and contributing to a brighter future.

However, I recognize that the prevailing One China policy could impact the process of economic development in the Asia Pacific region. The One China policy influences the dynamics of cooperation and diplomacy within the region. Countries in the Asia Pacific region may face political and economic pressures while determining their actions against the One China policy. This could potentially affect regional collaborations aimed at forming child-friendly communities, especially for children with disabilities, as political decisions might influence economic choices and multilateral cooperation. To address potential impacts of the One China policy, it's essential for Asia Pacific nations to strike a balance between political demands and the goal of sustainable economic development. While the One China policy could influence regional dynamics, the commitment to child-friendly values, children's rights, and sustainable economic development should remain the foremost priority.

Thus, the presence of child-friendly communities, especially for children with disabilities, plays a vital role in achieving sustainable economic development in the Asia Pacific. These communities create an environment where every child enjoys equal and fair

opportunities for growth, ultimately shaping a highly competitive human resource pool. Through international cooperation, collaboration with international organizations, and unwavering determination, the Asia Pacific region can overcome challenges and harness its great potential to achieve these objectives.

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