Driving the Saudi Green Initiative
How Local Authorities Can Lead on the Ground

With the launch of the **Saudi Green Initiative** ("SGI"), Saudi Arabia has laid out a bold roadmap to address pressing environmental challenges and accelerate its journey toward sustainable development. At its heart, SGI targets transformative milestones: planting **10 billion trees**, rehabilitating millions of hectares of degraded land and designating **30% of the Kingdom's land** as protected areas. These efforts aim to combat desertification, enhance biodiversity and foster climate resilience while improving the overall quality of life for all Saudis.

While national regulatory and execution entities provide leadership and direction, the success of SGI hinges on the effective interplay between these national bodies and **local planning and implementation entities**. Local entities play a critical role in ensuring that afforestation efforts align with **regional and local priorities**, capitalize on their deep understanding of the **local landscape** and effectively mobilize **stakeholders**, including the private sector and community organizations. By bringing localized insights and executional capacity, these entities add significant value to the broader national strategy.

Exploring **five essential pillars of a successful afforestation strategy**, how can local entities work in tandem with national leadership to deliver tangible, on-the-ground impact that brings SGI's vision to life?

Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia

FTI CONSULTING™

1. Strategically Expand and Diversify Vegetation Cover

To achieve the ambitious goals of the SGI, local entities play a vital role in turning national targets into actionable, region-specific plans. With their **deep understanding of regional conditions** and access to **detailed local data** such as urban plans, land use maps and regional priorities, these entities are uniquely positioned to ensure afforestation efforts are sustainable, impactful and aligned with both national priorities and local development goals.

A foundational step for effective **site prioritization for afforestation** is for local entities to develop a comprehensive understanding of their region's green cover and natural characteristics. This understanding can be achieved accurately by leveraging the **granular data already available within these entities**, such as climate patterns, water availability, land use classifications and ecological information. By tapping into this locally held data, local entities can identify areas where afforestation efforts will deliver the greatest **environmental, social and economic benefits**.

Such insights allow for a targeted **site prioritization process** tailored to two distinct contexts:

— **Environmental Afforestation:** In natural areas such as wadis, rangelands and valleys, the focus is on restoring ecological balance and enhancing biodiversity. Local entities prioritize sites that can support long-term growth while contributing to regional resilience.
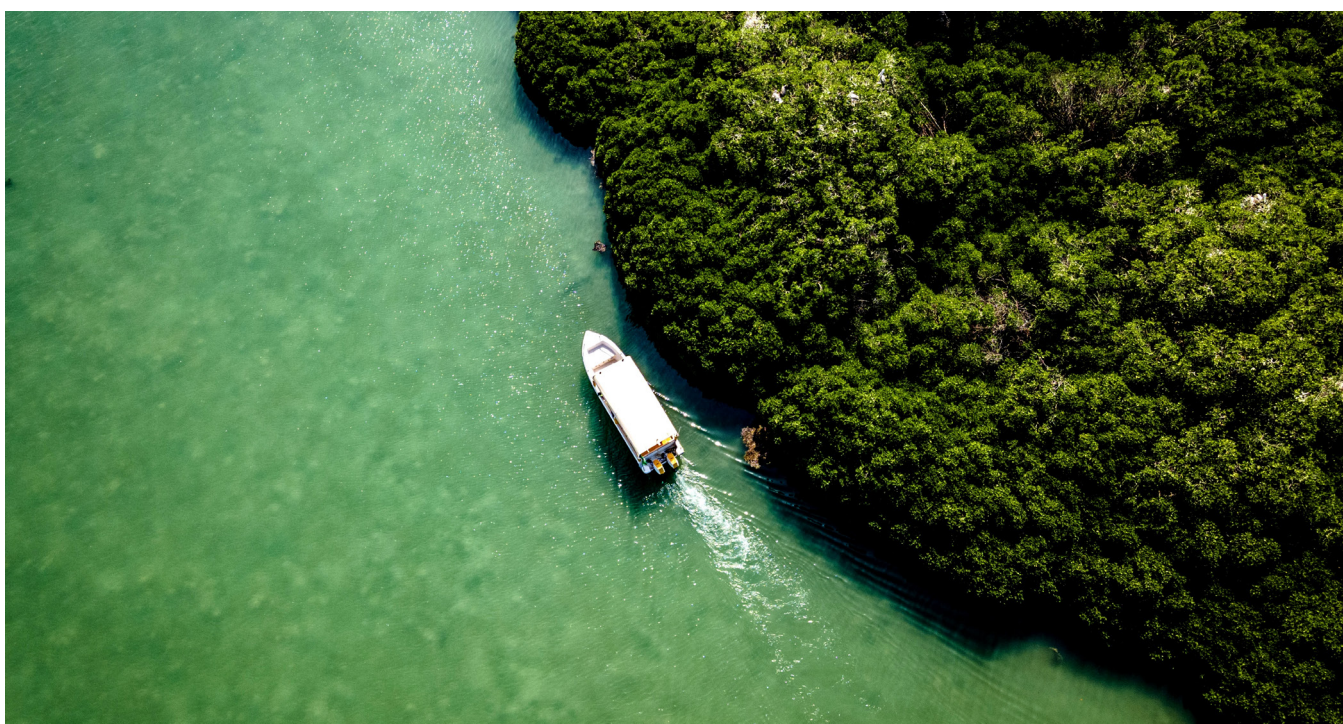
— **Urban Greening:** In urban centers, afforestation efforts focus on increasing livability and aligning with broader urban development plans. Local entities can identify opportunities to expand vegetation in strategic areas, such as **transport corridors**, densely populated neighborhoods and public spaces, to address the need for open spaces and improved environmental quality.

By taking a **targeted and context-specific approach**, local entities ensure that afforestation efforts contribute meaningfully to SGI's objectives while addressing regional priorities and improving the quality of life for communities.

2. Preserve Natural Habitats and Green Wealth

Expanding Saudi Arabia's green cover must go hand in hand with protecting its existing natural habitats and biodiversity. Local entities are instrumental in **identifying and safeguarding vulnerable ecosystems** such as mangroves, sabkhas, rangelands and high-altitude areas that house endangered species. By integrating these ecosystems into regional conservation plans, local entities can contribute to the broader national efforts led by central authorities.

Advanced monitoring tools play a central role in this preservation effort. Local entities can deploy **remote sensing platforms combined with on-ground monitoring** to track ecosystem health. For example, tools like geographic information system

Farasan, Saudi Arabia

("GIS") mapping help assess vegetation growth, while advanced water monitoring systems track water availability in critical habitats. Ground-based monitoring complements this, ensuring precision in regions where environmental conditions are dynamic.

Local communities can also contribute to conservation success. Platforms that engage citizens, such as reporting applications modeled after Dubai 24/7, allow residents to report illegal activities, environmental incidents, or issues like fallen trees and waterlogging. This fosters a sense of ownership while ensuring continuous surveillance of critical areas.

By **blending cutting-edge technology, on-ground expertise and community participation**, local entities not only preserve Saudi Arabia's natural green wealth but also build resilient ecosystems that align with SGI's goals.

3. Ensure Sustainable Use of Resources

In a water-scarce country like Saudi Arabia, sustainable resource management is critical to the success of afforestation projects. Local entities are uniquely positioned to secure **locally adapted seeds and plants** while optimizing water use at the regional level.

To address seed supply gaps, local entities can identify suitable locations **for seed banks, nurseries and seed orchards** tailored to regional conditions. By leveraging incentives such as land allocations and partnerships with the private sector, they can establish sustainable supply chains that reduce dependency on imports and improve project success rates.

Water resource efficiency requires meticulous planning. Local entities can integrate **treated wastewater systems** into afforestation projects, particularly in urban centers where wastewater treatment infrastructure exists. Additionally, they can deploy **rainwater harvesting systems** and upgrade **stormwater channels** to capture and utilize seasonal rainfall effectively for irrigation.

For example, rainwater harvesting in urban areas can support greening projects along road corridors[1] and public spaces, ensuring dual benefits of infrastructure development and resource sustainability.

Through these integrated solutions, local entities optimize the use of water and plant resources, enabling sustainable and impactful afforestation outcomes.

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Wadi Disah, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia

4. Foster an Educated and Engaged Community

The success of afforestation depends on fostering **community ownership and participation**. Local entities in Saudi Arabia play a leading role in mobilizing residents, educational institutions and NGOs to drive participation and understanding of the SGI agenda.

Community-driven planting initiatives serve as both engagement activities and awareness tools. By organizing collaborative planting days in urban parks, schools and public spaces, local entities provide residents with hands-on opportunities to contribute to greening their neighborhoods. Such activities raise awareness about afforestation's benefits, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. Feedback platforms can also help local entities align afforestation plans with community preferences, ensuring relevance and impact.

Partnerships with **schools, universities and NGOs** amplify these efforts. Local schools can integrate environmental education into curricula, while universities can lead research and development initiatives focused on afforestation practices. NGOs and community groups further mobilize volunteers for planting, monitoring and maintenance activities.

By combining practical engagement, education and incentive programs such as public recognition awards, local entities build a collaborative environment where communities actively support and contribute to greening initiatives.

5. Establish a Collaborative and Enabling Ecosystem

The successful implementation of SGI's afforestation goals relies on strong **governance frameworks** and seamless collaboration between national regulatory bodies, local entities and the private and third sectors. Local entities, as critical on-ground enablers, bridge the gap between **national strategies** and regional execution. By ensuring that afforestation initiatives align with **regional development priorities**, local entities support the integration of national frameworks into practical, localized actions.

Local entities have the opportunity to embed certain **afforestation initiatives** within their budgets and infrastructure development plans. This approach ensures efficient resource allocation while aligning afforestation efforts with ongoing and planned projects. For instance, **road corridors** under development provide strategic opportunities for urban greening. Similarly, projects involving stormwater channels, treated wastewater systems, or rainwater harvesting can include provisions for irrigating green spaces. By embedding afforestation practices into **infrastructure projects**, local entities ensure that afforestation becomes a core element of sustainable urban development.

Finally, and to ensure effective governance, local entities can establish **regional afforestation committees** that serve as coordination hubs. These committees bring together representatives from national regulatory bodies, environmental agencies and technical teams to facilitate **regular reviews and streamlined execution**. The committees ensure that afforestation efforts are aligned across national, regional and local plans while allowing for:

— **Ongoing performance monitoring** to evaluate afforestation progress and identify challenges early.

— **Continuous feedback loops** between national and local levels, ensuring that implementation remains agile and responsive to regional realities.

— **Technical guidance and capacity-building support** to enhance on-ground execution capabilities.

Through strategic alignment and robust governance, local entities act as catalysts for the Saudi Green Initiative, transforming national aspirations into tangible, on-ground impact.

Conclusion

The Saudi Green Initiative represents a transformative vision to create a greener, more sustainable future for Saudi Arabia. Its success will require a **clear and coordinated governance approach** — one that combines national leadership with the unique strengths of local planning and execution entities. While national bodies will continue to drive strategy, regulation and implementation at scale, local entities are indispensable partners in ensuring that these efforts are **contextually relevant, impactful and sustainable.**

By focusing on **five essential pillars** — strategically expanding and diversifying vegetation cover, preserving natural habitats, ensuring sustainable resource use, fostering community engagement and establishing a collaborative ecosystem — local entities contribute critical value to national goals. Their deep understanding of **local conditions**, ability to integrate efforts with regional plans and capacity to **mobilize stakeholders** are fundamental to the success of afforestation strategies.

Collaboration between national entities and local counterparts will allow Saudi Arabia to not only meet its ambitious targets but also ensure that afforestation initiatives deliver lasting **environmental, economic and social benefits**. Through thoughtful planning, strong partnerships and executional excellence, SGI will transform landscapes, enhance ecosystems and improve the quality of life for generations to come.

The path forward is clear: a **synergistic partnership** between national and local entities is the key to turning Saudi Arabia's ambitious environmental vision into an enduring, green reality.

Endnotes

[1] FTI Consulting "Road Corridors", See https://www.fticonsulting.com/insights/reports/paving-future

ANTOINE NASR
Senior Managing Director
+971 56 177 9606
antoine.nasr@fticonsulting.com

ABDO AL HABR
Senior Managing Director
+971 50 378 3365
abdo.alhabr@fticonsulting.com

KARIM BASSIL
Senior Managing Director
+971 50 378 5259
karim.bassil@fticonsulting.com

CAROLE HASSAN
Principal
+971 56 301 5299
carole.hassan@fticonsulting.com

FTI™ CONSULTING