



**PARENTS AS CATALYSTS FOR STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION
TOWARD INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

This study explores the role of parents as catalysts for structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. It employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of parents who actively engage in initiatives promoting inclusivity and sustainability in their communities. The research is based on interviews with ten parents from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify core themes. The findings highlight the essential role parents play in driving positive change within their families and communities. Parents actively contribute to promoting inclusive education, advocating for sustainable practices, and fostering economic resilience. Despite challenges such as limited resources and institutional support, they persist in creating lasting change, often generating ripple effects that extend beyond their immediate circles. To strengthen this transformative role, the study recommends several strategies, including the development of educational programs to enhance parental understanding of inclusivity and sustainability, the establishment of parent-led community networks, and the integration of sustainability themes into school curricula. Additionally, supporting parental advocacy, promoting financial literacy, and improving access to resources in underserved communities are essential for empowering parents to lead and inspire change. By providing parents with the tools, platforms, and support they need, communities can harness their potential as agents of structural transformation, advancing inclusive and sustainable development and ensuring a better future for future generations.

Keywords: *Change Agents; Community Networks; Community Development; Economic Resilience; Inclusive Education; Lifelong Learning; Social Cohesion; Structural Transformation; Sustainable Development*

Introduction

The role of parents in fostering societal change has gained increasing recognition, particularly in the context of inclusive and sustainable development. As primary caregivers, community members, and stakeholders, parents hold significant influence not only in the lives of their children but also in shaping the broader social and environmental structures in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Eden et al., 2024). As advocates for their children's well-being, parents can influence policies, educational frameworks, and community initiatives that promote equity and inclusivity. Recent studies indicate that when parents actively engage in advocacy, they can serve as catalysts for structural transformation, contributing significantly to achieving sustainable and inclusive development goals (Ainscow, 2020; Esterhulzen & Mohosho, 2023; United Nations, 2020; OECD, 2021). This research aims to examine how parents can act as catalysts for transformation, focusing on the mechanisms by which they influence policies, social structures, and educational practices to create a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Global initiatives, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasise the importance of inclusive and sustainable development in achieving equality, justice, and environmental stewardship (UNESCO, 2019). SDGs 4, 5, and 16, in particular, focus on quality education, gender equality, and the establishment of inclusive institutions that promote peace and justice (United Nations, 2020). Parents play a pivotal role in advancing these goals by fostering environments that value diversity, gender equity, and educational attainment (Keating & Baker, 2024; OECD, 2021). Research highlights that parental involvement in education and advocacy can reduce educational disparities, enhance resource access, and shape children's attitudes toward inclusivity and sustainability (Epstein, 2018; Spera, 2020). Furthermore, parents increasingly assume activist roles within their communities, advocating for policies and initiatives that benefit not only their children but also the broader community. Grassroots parental movements have successfully influenced educational policies, community safety, and environmental practices in various countries (Heidemann, 2023). Despite this, research on the specific role of parents as catalysts for structural transformation remains sparse. This study addresses this gap by exploring how parents contribute to inclusive and sustainable development and examining the factors that either enable or hinder their involvement in such transformative efforts.

While the impact of parental involvement on child development and educational outcomes is well documented (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Epstein, 2018), less attention has been given to the role of parents in advocating for and driving structural changes that promote inclusive and sustainable development. Many communities still grapple with challenges related to educational inequity, social exclusion, and unsustainable practices, which are often exacerbated by systemic policy and resource allocation limitations (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2019; Zickafoose et al., 2024). Without structural reforms, the potential for parents to contribute meaningfully to societal transformation remains underutilized. It is crucial to understand how parents can mobilise resources, influence policies, and foster partnerships that promote inclusivity and sustainability. While much of the existing research focuses on parental engagement at the individual or family level, there is limited exploration of their role in broader structural change. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining the factors that enable or hinder parents' participation in structural transformation, particularly in areas marked by resource scarcity and entrenched inequalities. The study will identify pathways through which parents can engage in activities that go beyond family needs and contribute to systemic change. Although substantial research has explored the effects of parental involvement on academic success and behavioural outcomes, there is limited understanding of how parents can leverage their influence to drive structural transformation. Most studies focus on parental engagement in schools, emphasising individual child outcomes rather than broader societal impacts (Goodall & Montgomery, 2023; OECD, 2021). Additionally, while research on grassroots movements for social change exists, the specific contributions of parents within these movements have not been sufficiently explored. There is a need for research that examines the intersection between parental involvement and systemic change, especially in advancing inclusivity and sustainability. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on parents as agents of structural transformation within their communities, identifying both the enablers and barriers to their involvement in promoting inclusivity and sustainability. This study is motivated by the need to expand the understanding of how parents can contribute to achieving inclusive and sustainable development goals through active participation in structural transformation. As inclusive policies and sustainable practices become increasingly crucial, understanding the unique role of parents in driving these changes is essential (Mann et al., 2024; United Nations, 2020). By investigating the mechanisms through which parents advocate for and achieve change, this research provides insights into how community-based initiatives and policy interventions can better support parental involvement in societal transformation. The study

aims to create a framework that empowers parents to take on transformative roles within their communities, advancing the goals of inclusivity and sustainability.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore and understand the role of parents as catalysts for structural transformation in promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising a phenomenological approach to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of parents actively participating in initiatives that promote structural transformation for inclusivity and sustainability. A qualitative design is particularly suitable for this study as it facilitates a deep understanding of parents' perspectives, motivations, and the specific roles they play in influencing community structures and policies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). By focusing on individual experiences, the study captures the diverse ways in which parents contribute to, and impact societal transformation within their communities.

The study uses purposive sampling to select participants who are actively engaged in promoting inclusivity and sustainable development in their communities. This sampling strategy is ideal for the study's focus on parents who have taken a proactive role in advocating for structural change. Purposive sampling ensures that participants possess relevant experience, providing rich and contextually insightful data (Patton, 2015). A total of ten parents from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds were selected, ensuring a balanced range of perspectives. Data collection involves semi-structured interviews, which provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' experiences and roles in fostering structural transformation. This flexible method allows participants to express their views openly, while the researcher can probe for more detailed insights. Each participant is interviewed individually, using an interview guide with open-ended questions focusing on their motivations, challenges, and perceived impacts of their involvement in inclusive and sustainable initiatives. Interviews, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, are conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage candid responses. All interviews are recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, which is suitable for identifying patterns, themes, and key insights across qualitative data. The process

involves familiarising oneself with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing and defining those themes, and writing up the results. The researcher reads and re-reads interview transcriptions to ensure a thorough understanding of the data. Codes are assigned to excerpts that align with recurring concepts related to parental roles, motivations, challenges, and impacts. These codes are then grouped into broader themes, such as "advocacy for inclusivity," "challenges in structural transformation," and "impact on community development." The final analysis organises and refines themes to reflect the nuances of the participants' responses, and sub-themes are developed to provide deeper insights. The findings are presented as a narrative, incorporating direct quotes from participants to illustrate key themes and provide authentic insights into parents' roles in fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

Findings and Discussion

The data revealed that parents play a critical role in facilitating structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. As primary caregivers, role models, and active participants in their communities, parents' actions and values influence not only their children but also the broader social, economic, and environmental context. Below are some of the key roles that parents play in this process.

Promoting Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning

One of the key themes identified in this study is the active role parents play in promoting inclusive education and fostering a commitment to lifelong learning, both of which are foundational for inclusive and sustainable development. Parents expressed how their engagement in inclusive education efforts contributes to structural transformation within their communities, particularly in enhancing access to quality education and promoting diversity in learning environments. Many participants described their efforts to advocate for equal access to educational resources, especially in under-resourced schools and communities. For instance, some parents worked with local school councils to secure funding for inclusive educational programs that accommodate children with disabilities or language barriers. One parent shared, *"I believe all children should have the same chance to learn, no matter their background. By working with the school, we managed to get more learning aids and support for kids who need extra help. It makes a difference when parents speak up."* This advocacy was particularly prominent among parents from marginalised communities, who noted that their involvement helped bridge gaps in educational access, which they see as a critical factor in achieving broader

societal inclusion and sustainable development. Several parents highlighted how they intentionally foster values of inclusivity and respect for diversity within their homes, which they believe has a ripple effect on their children's attitudes toward inclusivity and sustainable development. Parents shared examples of encouraging their children to embrace classmates from various backgrounds and cultures, fostering an inclusive mindset from a young age. One parent emphasised, *"I make it a point to teach my kids to value everyone equally. When they see me supporting inclusive programs, they understand that everyone deserves the same opportunities to learn and grow."* This focus on values-based education reflects parents' recognition of the broader social impact of inclusivity, as children internalise these values and carry them forward into school and community settings, promoting a more equitable social structure and sustainable development.

Parents also reported their efforts to cultivate a lifelong learning mindset within their families, often by modelling continuous education and personal growth. Many described attending adult education or vocational courses, encouraging their children to view learning as an ongoing process beyond formal schooling. This approach was seen as essential in adapting to future challenges and fostering resilience and sustainable development. One parent described how, *"When my kids see me studying, they understand that learning never stops. It helps them to value education, not just as a requirement but as something that adds to life at every stage."* This promotion of lifelong learning supports sustainable development by preparing individuals to adapt to changing economic and social conditions, equipping future generations with the skills needed for meaningful engagement in society.

In addition to supporting their children's education, several parents were actively involved in community-based initiatives that promote inclusive learning and sustainable development. For instance, some volunteered to teach basic literacy and numeracy skills to adults and young children in the community, addressing education gaps and enabling broader access to learning. One participant explained, *"I volunteer in a weekend program to teach reading and writing to those who missed out on school. It's fulfilling to see adults and children learning together, breaking down barriers that keep them from progressing."* Such community engagement exemplifies how parents extend the principles of inclusive education beyond their own families, contributing to a broader social transformation that values and supports learning for all community members and sustainable development.

Despite their efforts, parents also faced challenges in promoting inclusive education, primarily due to limited resources and sometimes resistance within their communities. Parents from

lower-income backgrounds mentioned constraints in accessing necessary resources to support their children's education fully. One parent noted, *"It is difficult when resources are limited. We push for change, but sometimes it feels like an uphill battle. Still, I believe that if we don't advocate for our children, no one else will."* These insights highlight the resilience of parents in the face of challenges, as well as the need for supportive policies and partnerships to enhance parental contributions to inclusive and sustainable education.

Parents play a crucial role in promoting inclusive education and lifelong learning, as their involvement can drive structural transformation towards inclusivity and sustainable development. Oloba (2024) indicates that parental advocacy is essential in addressing educational inequalities, particularly in under-resourced communities. By collaborating with school councils and local education authorities, parents help bridge gaps in resource distribution and enhance support for diverse learning needs, including those of children with disabilities or language barriers. For example, parents in this study secured funding for inclusive programs, underscoring the impact of grassroots advocacy. This role aligns with UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda, which emphasises the importance of family and community involvement in making education accessible and equitable (UNESCO, 2022). Parents, especially those from marginalised communities, contribute to structural changes by advocating for equal access and thereby facilitating sustainable development through educational inclusion.

Moreover, parents' influence extends beyond the school environment into instilling inclusive values and a lifelong learning mindset in their children. Parental involvement in modelling respect for diversity and continuous education encourages children to develop an inclusive worldview and resilience, which are crucial for future adaptability (Furu et al., 2023). For instance, parents teaching their children to value peers from diverse backgrounds not only fosters inclusivity but also reinforces social cohesion—a cornerstone of sustainable development (Eden et al., 2024; OECD, 2023). By participating in adult education and community literacy programs, parents further demonstrate the significance of lifelong learning, inspiring their children to embrace education as an ongoing journey. This approach aligns with the goals of inclusive and sustainable development, as it equips future generations with adaptable skills to address evolving social and economic challenges. The resilience parents display, even in the face of resource limitations, highlights their determination to make education inclusive, signalling a need for policies that bolster parental contributions to sustainable development (Esterhulzen & Mohosho, 2023).

Modelling and Teaching Sustainable Values

Parents emphasised their role as primary influencers in shaping their children's environmental and social responsibility, viewing these values as essential for long-term sustainable development. Many parents spoke about intentionally modelling environmentally friendly behaviours that align with sustainable development tenets within the home and community. Parents described activities such as recycling, reducing household waste, conserving water and energy, and maintaining home gardens as daily practices their children observe and emulate. A parent from an urban area shared, *"I make it a point to show my kids that small actions matter. We recycle together, we turn off lights, and we talk about why these actions are important for the planet. I want them to know that their actions have an impact."* Another participant, who participates in local community clean-ups, noted that involving children in these activities has heightened their understanding of environmental stewardship, fostering a sense of responsibility and pride in contributing to a cleaner, healthier community.

The participants highlighted the importance of teaching their children about inclusivity and social justice, recognising these as core components of sustainable development. Many described initiating conversations with their children about issues such as equality, respect for diversity, and empathy towards others. Parents shared examples of how they engage their children in charitable activities, volunteer work, and discussions about social issues to develop their children's empathy and sense of community. One parent explained, *"I talk to my kids about fairness and treating others with respect, regardless of their background. We volunteer together at the community centre, which gives them real-life examples of helping others and valuing differences. I want them to grow up with a strong sense of justice."*

Another key insight was the deliberate effort by parents to teach their children about mindful consumption. Many parents expressed concerns about overconsumption and described guiding their children to understand the environmental impact of their choices, from limiting plastic use to choosing durable, eco-friendly products. A parent from a rural community explained, *"We talk about not wasting resources. When we shop, we choose products with less packaging, or sometimes, we make things at home instead of buying them. I tell my kids that every choice we make can either help or harm the environment."* This mindful approach to consumption was seen by parents as a practical way to instil a sustainable mindset in their children, teaching them to value quality over quantity and to appreciate the impact of their everyday decisions.

The role of parents in modelling and teaching sustainable values is pivotal in fostering a generation equipped to address environmental and social challenges, thereby driving structural

transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the family serves as a critical microsystem where values, attitudes, and behaviours are formed and nurtured. The practices highlighted, such as recycling, conserving resources, and participating in community activities, align with sustainable development goals (SDGs) 11 and 12, which emphasise sustainable cities and communities and responsible consumption and production. Research by Frosch et al. (2021) underscores that children who observe environmentally conscious behaviours in their homes are more likely to internalize and practice these values, demonstrating the long-term impact of parental modelling. By involving their children in practical activities like community clean-ups and discussions on environmental stewardship, parents not only instil responsibility but also nurture pride in contributing to societal well-being, reinforcing Bandura's social learning theory that emphasises learning through observation and imitation.

In addition to environmental values, the emphasis on inclusivity and mindful consumption is instrumental in shaping socially conscious and ethically responsible individuals. Teaching children about diversity, social justice, and mindful resource use fosters empathy, fairness, and an understanding of global interconnectivity—values central to achieving SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). Studies by Pastorelli et al. (2016) and Roy and Giraldo-García (2018) highlight the significance of parental influence in cultivating prosocial behaviours and ethical decision-making, suggesting that early exposure to social justice and equity discussions can lead to more inclusive attitudes in adulthood. Moreover, guiding children toward mindful consumption addresses the growing challenges of overconsumption and resource depletion. By promoting practices like reducing plastic use and opting for eco-friendly products, parents align household behaviours with sustainable development principles. Thus, the intentional actions of parents serve as catalysts for nurturing a sustainable mindset in children, preparing them to contribute meaningfully to inclusive and sustainable development.

Advocating for Policy and Community Development

Advocating for policy and community development emerged as a significant aspect of the role that parents play in fostering structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. A substantial number of participants emphasised their involvement in local decision-making bodies, such as community boards, school councils, and parent-teacher associations. Parents reported that these platforms allowed them to voice their concerns about community and school-level issues, such as equitable access to resources, infrastructure

development, and educational inclusivity. One participant explained: *“Being part of the school council has given me a way to speak out on behalf of parents and students. We’ve been able to push for accessible learning resources, which I believe is a step toward a more inclusive school environment.”* This level of engagement demonstrates how parents can contribute to community development by advocating for policies that reflect the diverse needs of their communities, thus fostering inclusivity and sustainable development.

Several parents described their involvement in advocating for environmental sustainability within their communities. Many of these parents have collaborated with local environmental groups to organise neighbourhood clean-ups, recycling initiatives, and awareness campaigns about sustainable practices. Parents highlighted that they saw these actions as a way to model sustainability for their children and other community members. As one participant noted, *“I want my children to grow up understanding the importance of caring for our environment. By organising neighbourhood clean-ups and engaging in recycling efforts, I’m hoping to inspire other families to join in and make these practices part of our community culture.”* This type of advocacy not only reinforces sustainable practices within families but also promotes collective action toward a more environmentally conscious community.

Another common area of advocacy among the parents interviewed was the promotion of inclusive educational policies that could promote sustainable development. Parents described their efforts to engage with local school administrators and educators to ensure that children of diverse abilities and backgrounds have equal opportunities for learning. For example, some parents mentioned advocating for more inclusive curricula, the availability of special education resources, and programs that promote cultural diversity and understanding. A parent expressed the impact of these initiatives as follows: *“I have been working with other parents to encourage our school to introduce more inclusive programs that celebrate our diverse community. It is important for all students to feel represented and respected in their learning environment.”* This active advocacy supports the structural transformation of educational systems, promoting inclusive policies that recognise and accommodate diversity.

While many parents have succeeded in advocating for changes in their communities, they also reported facing significant challenges. Common obstacles included a lack of resources, limited support from local government officials, and resistance from other community members. Some parents noted feeling disheartened by slow progress but emphasised their determination to persist. As one parent shared, *“It is not easy getting everyone on board, especially when funding and resources are limited. But I’ve realised that change takes time, and even small victories*

matter. We're building a foundation for future generations." This insight highlights the resilience and commitment of parents who, despite encountering barriers, remain steadfast in their advocacy efforts for inclusive and sustainable community development.

Many parents perceived that their advocacy efforts positively impacted not only the community but also their own families. They reported that being active advocates helped foster a sense of purpose and responsibility in their children, instilling values of social justice, environmental stewardship, and community participation. One parent reflected on this impact, saying, *"My children have started joining me in these initiatives. They're learning the importance of standing up for others and taking care of our environment. It has become a family commitment to contribute to positive changes."* These reflections underscore how parental advocacy extends beyond immediate policy changes to create long-lasting cultural shifts within families, promoting the values of inclusivity and sustainability across generations.

Parental advocacy in policy and community development plays a pivotal role in fostering structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. Studies emphasise that parents, through their involvement in local decision-making platforms like PTAs, community boards, and school councils, serve as critical voices in advancing equitable access to resources and educational inclusivity within schools and communities (Eden et al., 2024). Through these forums, parents can address disparities in resource allocation and advocate for policies that reflect the diverse needs of students, thereby fostering inclusivity. For instance, advocating for accessible learning materials and inclusive school environments empowers families and communities to support the educational needs of all students, regardless of socioeconomic background. This form of advocacy aligns with theories of community-driven transformation, which underscore the importance of local stakeholders in advancing socially responsible and inclusive policies (Wirba, 2024).

Additionally, parents play a key role in promoting environmental sustainability through community-focused initiatives, which contribute to sustainable development on a broader scale. Studies indicate that grassroots efforts, such as neighbourhood clean-ups, recycling campaigns, and environmental awareness programs, have a positive impact on community attitudes toward sustainability and model eco-friendly practices for future generations (Sewak et al., 2021). By leading these initiatives, parents instill values of environmental stewardship in their children, encouraging practices that promote long-term ecological sustainability. This type of community-based advocacy not only fosters immediate environmental benefits but also cultivates a culture of responsibility, ultimately embedding sustainable practices within family

and community life. Such contributions underscore the potential of parent-led advocacy to drive structural transformation, as they inspire collective action and policy shifts toward more inclusive, sustainable, and socially conscious communities.

Building Social Cohesion and Community Networks

The participants highlight that parents play a key role in facilitating structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development by building social cohesion and community networks. In the context of this study, parents contribute to social integration, mutual support, and the establishment of inclusive community networks. These efforts are fundamental in fostering solidarity, resilience, and collective action toward achieving sustainable development goals. The data revealed that one of the parents' roles in inclusive and sustainable development is to actively participate in building and strengthening community networks. Several parents highlighted their involvement in organising neighbourhood meetings, local advocacy campaigns, and collaborative projects that focus on addressing issues such as inequality, access to education, and environmental sustainability. For example, one parent mentioned, *"I have been part of a local group that advocates for better waste management. We bring together families to talk about recycling and waste reduction, and the children often lead the campaigns. This creates a strong sense of community."*

Participants indicated that they often spearhead initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity and sustainable development. They emphasised the importance of creating spaces where diverse families, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural background, feel valued and included. One respondent shared, *"We've organised cultural exchange programs for children, where they share traditions and learn about one another. It helps children understand the importance of embracing diversity and creates bonds that last beyond school."* Parents act as bridges between schools, local governments, and community organizations. Many parents reported collaborating with schools to promote initiatives such as inclusive education and sustainable practices. For instance, one parent stated, *"I work closely with the school's environmental club to educate both students and parents about sustainability. It's a partnership that has extended to local businesses and government to create a more sustainable neighbourhood."* Parents also facilitate intergenerational exchange by involving grandparents and elderly community members in educational, community activities, and sustainable development. This involvement fosters wisdom-sharing and reinforces values of respect, sustainability, and social justice. One parent reflected, *"We have regular gatherings where parents and older community members*

share life skills and traditional knowledge about resource conservation. The younger generation learns from this, and the elders feel more connected to the community.”

While parents’ involvement in community building and sustainable development is commendable, many participants acknowledged the challenges faced in creating sustainable and effective networks. Limited resources, time constraints, and the lack of institutional support were identified as barriers to expanding these initiatives. A participant expressed, *“We try to organise but sometimes lack the resources to carry out larger projects. It's challenging when there isn't enough funding or logistical support from local authorities.”* Parents reported positive changes in social cohesion as a result of their involvement in these community networks. Many emphasised how these efforts have fostered greater trust among neighbours and enhanced collective responsibility for sustainable practices. One interviewee summarised, *“By working together on local issues like water conservation, we’ve built a stronger, more cohesive community. Everyone feels more responsible for keeping the environment clean, and it’s united us across different backgrounds.”*

Parents play a critical role in fostering social cohesion and building community networks that drive structural transformation towards inclusive and sustainable development. Studies by Gutberlet (2021) and Lemos Lourenço and Neres Lourenco (2016) found that community-building efforts by parents promote solidarity and inclusivity, essential components for achieving the United Nations SDGs. In this study, parents highlighted the importance of collaborative neighbourhood meetings, local advocacy campaigns, and projects addressing issues such as environmental sustainability and education equality. Through these actions, parents facilitate mutual support networks, helping to address socio-economic inequalities and bolster community resilience (Eden et al., 2024). For instance, parental efforts in waste management education among children and community members underscore how small, locally driven actions can collectively contribute to broader sustainability objectives. Such actions align with studies that emphasise the need for grassroots initiatives in achieving environmental goals (Moallemi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, parents bridge gaps between diverse community groups, fostering spaces where people from different backgrounds feel valued and connected. This inclusive approach not only strengthens social bonds but also reinforces the value of diversity, which is central to social cohesion and sustainable communities (Fonseca et al., 2019). Parents' roles as liaisons among schools, local governments, and businesses further highlight their capacity to drive multi-stakeholder partnerships, as suggested by UNDP (2022). These collaborations extend into

intergenerational exchanges, which research suggests are vital for embedding long-term sustainability and social justice values in younger generations (Spijkers, 2018). Challenges, such as limited resources and institutional support, present hurdles; however, studies argue that community-led initiatives are often effective despite these limitations by fostering a sense of shared responsibility and accountability among community members (Babajide & Smith, 2022; Khalatbari, 2024). This collective effort enhances neighbourhood trust and cohesion, demonstrating parents' essential role as catalysts for structural transformation.

Fostering Economic Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods

The data revealed that parents act as key catalysts for structural transformation and foster economic resilience and sustainable livelihoods within their families and communities. Many parents emphasised the importance of financial literacy in building resilience within their households, which they consider key to inclusive and sustainable development. A common emphasis among the participants was the active role of parents in educating their children about managing resources, budgeting, and understanding the value of savings. One participant stated, “I teach my children how to manage their money, how to save a portion, and how to make sure they don’t overspend. This is the foundation for their future resilience and sustainability.” This aligns with the broader idea that fostering financial literacy at a young age equips the next generation with the necessary skills to navigate economic challenges, contributing to a sustainable livelihood.

Parents in this study also reported their involvement in promoting entrepreneurship and sustainable development within their families. Many parents operate small businesses, either formally or informally, and actively encourage their children to learn entrepreneurial skills, which they consider a component of sustainable development. One of the parents stated, “*I want my children to understand that a job is not the only option. I show them how we make our living through our business and encourage them to think about opportunities around them.*” This reflects the growing importance of entrepreneurial education in fostering economic independence, resilience, and sustainable development, particularly in marginalised communities where formal employment opportunities may be scarce.

Parents were also found to emphasise sustainable resource management practices, which contribute to both economic resilience and environmental sustainability. Several parents described their efforts to teach children about sustainable agriculture, waste reduction, and energy conservation. One participant shared, “We started growing our own vegetables, using

rainwater to water the garden, and reducing electricity use. My children now know that taking care of the environment means saving money and reducing costs in the long run.” This type of knowledge-sharing between parents and children not only contributes to sustainable development but also ensures economic savings and long-term resilience within the family unit.

Parents often engage in community-based economic activities, such as cooperatives, trading groups, or local savings schemes, which help promote collective economic resilience and sustainable development. These initiatives often involve pooling resources to invest in local businesses, share knowledge on sustainable economic practices, or provide financial assistance to those in need. One participant described their involvement in a local savings group: *“We contribute monthly, and it helps when we face financial hardship. It’s also a way of building a stronger community and supporting each other, which is key for sustainability.”* These cooperative efforts promote solidarity and economic empowerment within the community, contributing to the broader goals of sustainable development.

The role of parents in fostering economic resilience and sustainable livelihoods highlights the potential of family-centered initiatives for building financial literacy and resilience at the grassroots level, which is vital for inclusive development. Studies suggest that financial literacy is a cornerstone of economic resilience, helping individuals and families navigate financial challenges and make informed economic decisions that contribute to long-term sustainability (Zulfikri & Faqihah, 2019). By teaching children budgeting, savings, and resource management skills, parents empower the next generation to handle economic pressures, reduce vulnerability, and achieve financial independence (OECD, 2020). This aligns with a larger body of literature, indicating that early exposure to financial skills helps to mitigate the impacts of economic instability and encourages intergenerational wealth and sustainability (Wang et al., 2022). The data thus underscore parents’ foundational role in fostering sustainable livelihoods by embedding essential skills that contribute to a stable economic future.

In addition, parents’ focus on entrepreneurship and sustainable resource management provides children with diverse pathways toward economic independence and environmental responsibility, which are key components of sustainable development. Many parents in marginalised communities teach entrepreneurial skills as an alternative to formal employment, reflecting findings that entrepreneurial education can enhance economic self-sufficiency and resilience, especially where job opportunities are limited (Ajani, 2024). The data also reveal parents’ emphasis on resource conservation practices, such as sustainable agriculture and waste

reduction, which foster both economic and environmental resilience (Yu et al., 2021). Moreover, participation in community-based economic activities, like cooperatives or savings groups, underscores the communal approach to resilience, reinforcing social capital and economic solidarity (Ndlovu & Msimanga, 2023). These practices strengthen community ties and mutual support systems, contributing to a transformative model of inclusive and sustainable development that integrates economic resilience with environmental stewardship.

Empowering Children as Future Change Agents

The role of parents in empowering children to become future change agents emerged as a vital component of structural transformation for inclusive and sustainable development. By instilling values of social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and social justice, parents can shape the attitudes and behaviours of their children, preparing them to become leaders who will contribute to the development of an inclusive and sustainable society. A central theme that emerged from the interviews is the motivation of parents to prepare their children to actively contribute to a better future. Many parents expressed a strong desire to ensure that their children not only succeed academically but also develop into well-rounded individuals with a strong sense of social responsibility and sustainable development. They noted that in addition to traditional education, they see it as their responsibility to teach their children about important social, environmental, and economic issues and sustainable development. One of the participants remarked: *"I teach my children about the importance of recycling and how small actions can impact the planet. I want them to grow up understanding that they are stewards of the environment."* Another participant also stated that: *"It's important for me that my children know the value of fairness and equality. I have taught them that everyone should have equal opportunities, regardless of their background."*

Several recurring values were mentioned by parents as being central to the empowerment of their children for sustainable development. These include environmental consciousness, social justice, and community engagement. Parents emphasised the importance of teaching children to be empathetic, responsible, and proactive in addressing societal issues. A majority of the participants mentioned that they encourage their children to take small, manageable steps toward sustainability, such as conserving water, reducing waste, and participating in community clean-up activities. A parent remarked: *"I teach my children how to manage water. I also take them to community events where people come together to help each other regarding sustainability issues. They learn that helping others is important for sustainable development."*

While parents expressed strong intentions to raise socially and environmentally conscious children, they also identified challenges in fully achieving this goal. These barriers included financial limitations, time constraints, and the lack of community support. Parents who were engaged in work and family responsibilities often found it difficult to find time to fully participate in sustainable activities or community programs. For example, participant 6 stated that: *"I try to teach them, but sometimes I'm too busy with work. I know I should be more involved, but it's hard to find the time."* Participant 3 also mentioned: *"There isn't much support from the school or the community for these kinds of initiatives. It can feel like we're doing it on our own."*

Despite these challenges, many parents reported that their children actively engaged with and embraced the values they were taught. Children were reported to demonstrate a high level of interest in issues such as environmental protection, social equality, and local community service. Several parents noted that their children had initiated their own projects, such as organising school recycling programs or advocating for equality in their communities. Participant 1 reported that: *"My daughter started a petition in her class about equal access to resources for students from all backgrounds. I was so proud of her."* Similarly, participant 10 indicated that: *"My son loves volunteering at the local food bank. He believes it's important to help those who have less, and he encourages his friends to join him."* Parents highlighted that they believe empowering their children to become change agents will lead to long-term benefits for society and the environment. They see their efforts as contributing to a larger movement that will result in a generation of individuals who are more aware of the need for inclusive and sustainable practices. For example, participant 5 is of the opinion that: *"If we all start teaching our children these values, the next generation will grow up with a totally different mindset. They will be more aware and responsible in their choices."* Participant 9 alluded: *"I think that teaching children to be advocates for change now means they will continue these practices when they grow up. It will make a difference in the long run."* Empowering children as future change agents reflects the essential role parents play in fostering structural transformation toward a more inclusive and sustainable society. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, family environments heavily influence children's development, and parents' active involvement in teaching values of social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and social justice provides a foundation for future societal contributions (Elliott & Davis, 2020). Hosany et al. (2022) underscore this idea, noting that children exposed to environmental and social issues at an early age are more likely to develop

long-term sustainability values. Parents who instill these values are effectively contributing to shaping a generation capable of addressing global challenges, particularly those related to environmental degradation and social inequity (Sihvonen et al., 2024). By engaging children in sustainable practices such as recycling, community service, and awareness of social issues, parents are nurturing both the knowledge and the empathy necessary for children to grow into adults committed to inclusive development.

However, parents face notable challenges in their efforts to foster these values due to factors such as limited time, financial constraints, and insufficient community support. Studies confirm that these barriers often inhibit parents from fully participating in activities promoting sustainability and social justice with their children (Wildmon et al., 2024). Despite these constraints, evidence suggests that even small parental efforts can yield significant positive outcomes, as children internalise and often act on the values they learn at home. For example, Grobler et al. (2022) found that children who receive consistent messages about the importance of social equality and environmental protection tend to engage in related initiatives independently, as illustrated by participants in this study who championed school recycling or advocated for equitable resource access. Such early engagement fosters a proactive attitude toward sustainable development, indicating that parents' empowerment efforts, even if constrained, may contribute to a transformative societal shift toward inclusivity and sustainability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of parents as catalysts for structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development:

Promote Parent Education on Inclusivity and Sustainability

It is recommended that the local governments, schools, and community organisations collaborate to develop educational workshops and ongoing awareness campaigns aimed at empowering parents with knowledge and skills in inclusivity, environmental sustainability, lifelong learning, and social justice. These programs can involve seminars, online modules, and hands-on activities where parents learn how to advocate for inclusive policies within the education system and adopt sustainable practices at home. By equipping parents with these tools, communities can foster a culture that values diversity, environmental responsibility, and

equitable access to resources, thereby positioning parents as pivotal agents of change in driving inclusive and sustainable development within their households and communities.

Foster Collaborative Community Networks

To strengthen parents' roles as catalysts for community-driven transformation, parent-led community groups focused on inclusive education, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience should be established and supported. Local governments, schools, and businesses can facilitate these networks by offering logistical support, meeting spaces, and initial funding. These groups can lead cultural exchange programs, skill-sharing workshops, and intergenerational activities that promote community cohesion, build mutual respect, and enable communities to collectively address challenges. By fostering these collaborative networks, communities can create a support system that encourages parents to take active roles in shaping inclusive and sustainable practices, uniting families toward a shared vision of community improvement.

Integrate Sustainability into School Curricula

Schools could weave themes of inclusivity, sustainability, and lifelong learning throughout their curricula while actively engaging Parent-Teacher Associations and parents in the development and implementation process. Through collaborative workshops, parents and educators can work together to design lessons that reflect the community's needs, reinforcing sustainable values in both school and home settings. Such integration ensures that children are consistently exposed to concepts of inclusivity and responsible environmental practices, while parents become more informed and involved in the educational journey. This approach not only strengthens family bonds around shared values but also establishes a foundation for sustainable behaviours that children carry forward, amplifying the impact of parents' involvement on a structural level.

Support Parental Advocacy and Leadership

To amplify parents' impact on policy and community development, local authorities should create accessible platforms that enable parents to engage in educational and environmental policymaking. Providing resources like grants, training, and mentorship will empower parents to lead initiatives addressing inequality, educational access, and sustainable practices within their communities. These platforms could include town halls, parent advisory boards, and

workshops on effective advocacy techniques. Supporting parental leadership in this way promotes civic responsibility and empowers parents to act as change-makers, driving inclusive and sustainable policies that benefit not only their families but also the broader community.

Encourage Sustainable Livelihoods and Financial Literacy

Programmes aimed at enhancing financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills for both parents and children are essential to fostering sustainable livelihoods and economic resilience. Community organisations, schools, and local governments can organise workshops on budgeting, resource management, and green entrepreneurship, emphasising how these skills contribute to resilience and sustainability. Supporting small-scale, parent-led businesses and cooperatives that model eco-friendly practices while involving youth in entrepreneurial activities provides practical learning opportunities. This recommendation could empower parents to strengthen their economic security while modelling sustainable economic practices for future generations, thus helping transform communities into more self-sustaining and resilient entities.

Enhance Accessibility to Resources

To ensure parents can effectively participate in transformative initiatives, governments and NGOs are encouraged to address resource gaps in under-resourced communities by providing funding, educational materials, and logistical support to parent-driven projects. Encouraging the use of digital platforms could expand access to shared resources, highlight successful community initiatives, and disseminate knowledge on inclusivity and sustainability. This access is particularly critical in areas with limited physical resources, as it allows parents to connect, collaborate, and participate in online forums and community networks that support their goals. With improved access to resources, parents are better equipped to drive structural transformation, bridging resource inequalities and fostering a culture of inclusive, sustainable growth in their communities.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the critical role parents play as agents of structural transformation toward inclusive and sustainable development. Parents actively promote inclusive education, lifelong learning, sustainable values, and economic resilience within their families and communities. Through their advocacy, community engagement, and modelling of sustainable

practices, they contribute to bridging educational, social, and environmental gaps, especially in marginalised areas. Despite challenges such as limited resources and institutional support, parents persist in fostering inclusive values and sustainable livelihoods, often creating ripple effects that benefit broader communities. To enhance this transformative role, it is essential to provide parents with the tools, platforms, and support necessary for impactful advocacy and action. By empowering parents as catalysts for change, societies can build a foundation for achieving inclusive and sustainable development goals, ensuring a better future for generations to come.

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