



Advancing Sustainable Development: Towards a New Horizon

The General Secretariat for Development Planning, in partnership with relevant ministries and government agencies, the private sector, civil society and the United Nations Development Programme Abu Dhabi Office, prepared Qatar's Second Human Development Report, *Advancing Sustainable Development* (2009 HDR), focusing on sustainable development themes.

The 2009 HDR identifies critical environmental parameters for Qatar, and concludes with several policy and management recommendations for *Advancing Sustainable Development*. It focuses on the themes of water security, marine environment and climate change, and their implications for human development in Qatar.

This is the second of a two-part series which summarises some of the key messages from the 2009 HDR. Here we will cover issues of marine environment and climate change.

Marine Environment: Preserving and Protecting Ecosystems

Besides being a natural source of food, water and wealth, Qatar's marine environment provides a unique habitat for its diverse marine life. But human activities are threatening the health, productivity and biodiversity of the country's marine environments. In recent years, a number of alarming incidents have been recorded in Qatar's waters such as, *inter alia*, the mortality of certain marine life, the destruction and bleaching of corals, the increased erosion of shores and associated habitats and increased coastal flooding.

Because of the ubiquitous nature of the hydrocarbon industry in Qatar, sound marine environment management by the extractive industries and their downstream counterparts is critical. Localised impacts by extractive industries occur on the seabed surrounding offshore platforms, at pipeline right-of-ways and at the point of effluent discharge to the sea. While the risks are minimized, the potential for operational and accidental oil spills exists. This has serious implications for the environment, the credibility of industries and the reputation of the nation.

Coastal development involving dredging and land reclamation for projects, such as residential areas, industry, causeways, fishing ports, airports and harbours, also takes a toll on the marine environment. Land-based industrial and municipal pollution is having a significant impact due to the nature of the local marine environment, which is characterized by weak water currents which flush out pollutants at a very slow rate.

Policy decisions therefore need to address the trade-offs between economic activities, such as oil and gas industries, water and energy production, construction, recreation and fisheries, and the impact that these activities have on marine environments.

The 2009 HDR calls for a national marine policy, with strong institutional backing, to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources. Active engagement of civil society is crucial to enlist public support for Qatar's environmental protection and conservation.

This in turn will help to influence the private sector to focus on their corporate social responsibilities and ensure that their commercially driven actions are not detrimental to Qatari society. Qatar has several successful examples of public-private partnerships, undertaken with the Ministry of Environment, involving species-specific research and the creation and management of marine reserves.

Climate Change: Reducing the Carbon Footprint

Climate change has been identified as the most pressing global environmental problem with potentially catastrophic consequences for human development. Addressing climate change is not only a cross-border phenomenon, but also a cross-generational challenge.

Qatar, with its large hydrocarbon industries, is vulnerable to climate change impacts. The nation's total carbon emissions from fossil fuels have recorded a substantial increase over the last two decades. This increase can be attributed to the expansion of upstream oil and gas operations, increased road transport and construction activities, and accelerated growth in the electricity and water services sectors.

Without direct action to ameliorate the rising trend in emissions, Qatar's carbon footprint can be expected to expand over the next decade, with potential long-term negative consequences for human development. In addressing climate change, Qatar needs to reconcile many priorities from economic growth to environmental management to human development and social development. As a consumer and key producer of fossil fuels, these priorities can at times be conflicting, especially against a backdrop of increasing local and global demand for energy.

The 2009 HDR argues that mitigating climate change, and adaptation to its consequences, require well-coordinated global, regional and local action to reduce causal factors such as greenhouse gas emissions. Qatar's abundant oil and gas reserves offer a window of opportunity to make the necessary investments for a transition to a post-carbon economy.

Continued investments in research and development by the Qatar Science and Technology Park, the Qatar National Research Fund, and through public-private partnerships will help develop and exploit environmentally friendly and energy efficient technologies.

Towards a Sustainable Future

The achievement of intergenerational equity with high human development necessitates that Qatar improves its environmental management, and promotes sustainable production and consumption of its natural resources.

Policies, strategies and programmes for sustainable development should be comprehensive and, where appropriate, integrate economic, social and environmental objectives. This entails building institutional and human resource capacities and addressing knowledge and data gaps. It also calls for the use of monitorable indicators of sustainable development for evidence-based policy-making.

In advancing its sustainable development objectives, the 2009 HDR asserts that Qatar should promote public participation in policy formulation and decision making, including the active participation of women. Public-private partnerships can also facilitate access to broader

financing options, assist skill and knowledge transfer and development, and make possible sustainable delivery of basic services, particularly energy and water.

Maintaining Qatar's advances in human development necessitates addressing sustainable development challenges. A neglect of these challenges has the potential to halt or reverse the significant progress that the nation has achieved.

The recommendations from this second National Human Development Report will be carefully reviewed by key stakeholders, and, as appropriate, will serve as inputs to Qatar's first National Development Strategy, 2010 - 2015.