



## Advancing Sustainable Development: Towards a New Horizon

The *Qatar National Vision 2030* (QNV 2030) foresees Qatar becoming an advanced, knowledge-based and diversified economy by 2030. In advancing towards this Vision, Qatar is committed to a development path that is compatible with the principles of sustainable development.

The pursuit of sustainable development, however, entails reconciling potential conflicts between the economy and the environment, and between the present and the future.

Qatar's Second Human Development Report, *Advancing Sustainable Development* (2009 HDR) focuses on key sustainable development themes. This Report was prepared by 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 (UNDP) Abu Dhabi Office.

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

In a two-part series we summarise the key messages from the 2009 HDR. In this first part we explore the issues of sustainable development and water security in Qatar.

### **Sustainable Development in Qatar: Ensuring Intergenerational Fairness**

The goal of sustainable development is to try to ensure intergenerational fairness. Sustainable development refers to three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars: economic growth, social equity and environmental protection.

With massive investments in infrastructure and the social sectors, Qatar has made remarkable progress in human development. As reported by UNDP in 2008, Qatar had advanced to 34<sup>th</sup> out of 179 countries in the Human Development Index by 2006, compared to a ranking of 57<sup>th</sup> a decade earlier. It has achieved spectacular gains in income, while avoiding rising income inequality. Impressive improvements have also occurred in health outcomes: progress in educational outcomes has been less spectacular.

While Qatar's hydrocarbon wealth has created previously undreamt of opportunities for development, the rights of future generations could be put at stake if such wealth is used inefficiently and/or economic development is beyond the carrying capacity of Qatar's economy and environment.

Increasing industrialisation and infrastructure development has resulted in massive inflows of predominantly unskilled expatriate labour. As a consequence, Qatar's population has grown at an unprecedented rate, more than doubling in size in the years up to 2008. Uncontrolled

economic and population growth are threatening sustainability and adversely affecting Qatar's environment in terms of land use and air quality, water and energy resources and marine biodiversity. They are also increasing stresses on housing and basic social services.

Qatar's chosen development path, as foreseen in QNV2030, therefore entails a transition from uncontrolled development relying on low-productivity, low-skilled and low-paid expatriate workers, to a diversified post-carbon economy relying on a highly-productive, highly-skilled and highly-educated labour force. Thus the 2009 HDR calls for policies and structural changes that reduce the flow of low-skilled foreign workers, and that develop local talent supported by higher-skilled expatriates.

#### **Water Security: Sustaining a Basic Necessity**

Qatar, with low rainfall, is water resource-poor. Water resources are under significant stress for many reasons, especially as a result of the country's rapid development and exceptionally high population growth. Conventional water resources have become seriously depleted and non-conventional alternatives, such as desalinated water and, to a lesser extent treated sewage effluent, now have an increasing role in the planning and development of an expanded water supply.

Qatar faces many challenges in ensuring an adequate supply of water to meet increasing consumer demand. These include dependence on desalinated water, the long lead time required to scale-up production of desalinated water and limited water storage capacity.

The 2009 HDR argues that Qatar's water policies, plans and projects need to strike a balance between competing demands for water, increasing water scarcity and ecological considerations, within the broader context of sustainable development. There should be a balance of both supply-side and demand-side management strategies. This includes continued research into innovative technologies and efforts to raise awareness of the critical issues of water and its efficient utilisation.

Beyond the measures relating directly to the management of water resources, there is a need to consider the extent to which Qatar can sustain such a rapidly growing expatriate population with all the implications this has for housing, basic social services and water and energy consumption.

The global financial crisis, that has markedly affected oil and gas prices, provides an opportunity to rethink public investment priorities and to invest more resources in quality education and skills training to support the transition to a post-carbon economy for *Advancing Sustainable Development*.