

International Seminar - 28-29 October 2008

Towards Qatar's National Strategy: Issues and Challenges

Panel 3: Results-based National Strategies: Setting Goals and Monitoring and Evaluation.
Best Practices and Lessons Learned from International Experiences

Speech delivered by Mr. Bader Omar AlDafa, Executive Secretary , UN ESCWA

**Excellencies,
Eminent members of the panel,
Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- It is a privilege to be among you, both in my capacity as a United Nations representative and as a Qatari national. This international gathering is an important milestone in the development process of the State of Qatar for ensuring that strategies, plans and programmes are harmonized to achieve the four pillars of Qatar's Vision for 2030.
- Over the past two decades, Qatar has been able to achieve significant economic and social progress, and today, is ranked 35th among 177 countries in the Human Development Index. This is the second highest ranking in the Arab world, and a significant improvement from 47th in 2000, achieved through targeted policies and focused financial priority-setting.
- This panel is devoted to looking at best practices and lessons learned in the area of setting goals, monitoring and evaluation and provides an opportunity to learn from global experiences.
- In this regard, I am happy to see among us colleagues from Malaysia, a role model in development planning, and a country which translated a clear vision into concrete plans and coordinated programmes.
- Notably, Malaysia's development philosophy incorporates the concept of equitable distribution within its growth strategy. Similarly, Qatar's Vision for 2030, is predicated on the belief that economic growth is neither sufficient to inspire national development, nor can it be considered an end in itself.
- The guiding principles and goals laid out in the National Vision must be reflected in results-based sector strategies and plans. These ideals should come to life and permeate all strategies and plans ensuring harmony and consistency on a set of nationally defined objectives and directions.
- The National Development Strategy provides Qatar the opportunity to rethink the **social contract** between citizens and the state, in which rights and duties are agreed to

by all, to further the common interest. To be effective, the National Strategy has to be articulated in an integrated manner and supported by a coalition of social and political forces, or Social Pacts, involving government, private sector and civil society.

- Experience tells us that creating a **shared consensus** is critically important in setting goals and developing a strategy. But informal consultations are not enough. Shared Consensus also requires institutionalized structured engagement and participation. National Economic and Social Councils are a good example of institutionalized participation of representative stakeholders. Economic and Social Councils are advisory bodies that systematically assess social impact of public policy and provide alternative proposals.
- In Ireland, for example, the Economic and Social Council is a small consultative body that reports to the Prime Minister on strategic issues relating to economic and social policy-making, and has played an important role in Ireland's recent economic and social boom.

In the process of formulation of the National Strategy in Qatar it is critically important to involve all stakeholders and partners, including the private sector, ensuring transparency and constructive collaborative efforts.

- Much effort and resources are often wasted in our region in duplicated efforts and uncoordinated programmes. Partners in development planning must recognize the cross-sectoral dependencies, and avoid the compartmentalization of line ministries. Information technology solutions, including collaborative spaces, dynamic portals and websites are particularly useful tools.
- As we heard yesterday, it is also critical to highlight the role of monitoring and evaluation in the development and implementation of results-based national strategies. A carefully designed and resourced monitoring and evaluation plan will allow the government of Qatar to determine whether the goals are being met and whether resources are utilized efficiently and effectively. This can only be realized using performance indicators and benchmarks. a central coordinating body responsible for monitoring and evaluating implementation and providing feedback for corrective actions is necessary.
- Independent and semi-independent think-tanks can also provide important feedback and accountability. National Observatories for economic and social indicators have proved to be effective institutional mechanisms in many developed and developing countries to monitor specific outcomes, and inform policy. Observatories can support the monitoring and analysis of economic, social and environmental trends.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- ESCWA's experience with member countries uncovered a number of common challenges faced by our region, and I have summarized key recommendations emerging from this analysis:

- **First:** A National Strategy should be written in clear and precise language, which is accessible to citizens, and follows professionally acceptable standards to be comparable across countries (for example, the World Bank Strategy Toolkit).
- **Second:** It must identify clear and visible priorities and outcomes, and must have agreed upon parameters to measure implementation. A realistic and detailed timeline is important to ensure timely implementation.
- **Third:** A national strategy should have an explicit feedback mechanism, including monitoring and evaluation for learning and adaptation. While many countries have statistical offices that collect data in various areas, few have developed an integrated set of indicators to allow analysis on the trade-offs or inter-linkages among economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Selecting the right basket of indicators is a challenge, especially given the difficulty in collecting data, including baseline data, in this region.

Fourth: Co-ordination of strategy objectives and initiatives with the national budgeting process is necessary. Finance ministers should be involved in the development strategy process to ensure alignment of overarching vision and strategic goals with national budget expenditures and budget priorities.

- **And Fifth:** Evaluation of both strategies and implementation, has been a neglected area, and should be explicitly planned for and involve various stakeholders. Different techniques and approaches emerge from various disciplines, however a mix of qualitative and quantitative tools can be developed to examine the effects, both intended and un-intended, of a given strategy or policy.
- A national strategy is not a magic wand. In the medium to long-term, work toward improving strategic and co-ordinated action toward development should yield larger gains and allow countries to identify emerging issues, and to continuously learn and adapt to a world where change and uncertainty is the norm, and not the exception.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As a regional commission, ESCWA has acquired a broad perspective on issues of development planning, identifying global lessons and best practices and disseminating them among countries in our region. ESCWA has supported a number of member countries in their formulation of strategies, and have provided technical assistance, primarily in the form of advisory services, to planning authorities and line ministries.

- In the last five years ESCWA has provided technical assistance to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine and Iraq in the formulation of part of their strategies in thrust areas such as transport, environment, WTO, ICT and social policy. ESCWA would be delighted to contribute to Qatar's endeavour to develop its national and sectoral strategies in our areas of competence.

- Finally, allow me to once again thank the General Secretariat for Development Planning for their kind invitation to take part in this important meeting. My colleagues, who are with me in this meeting and I, look forward to continuing this dialogue with you during this conference and after, and wish you every success.