Waste Management – a Qatari perspective

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Introduction

Waste management has been identified by the Qatar government as one of the most pressing environmental problems in Qatar. Due to an increasing population, dramatic rise in construction fuelled by the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2022, and overall industrial growth, an upward trend in waste generation in Qatar will continue for the near future.

Qatar produces more than 2.5 million tons of municipal solid waste annually, corresponding to a daily generation rate per capita of about 2.5 kg. Apart from municipal solid waste generated in the country, the construction industry contributes significantly towards waste generation in Qatar. For perspective, in 2012, it was estimated that commercial and industrial waste only amounted to 1 million tons, and construction and demolition waste amounted to 20,000 tons per day.

Until relatively recently, a majority of solid waste (domestic, commercial, industrial and construction) ended up in landfills with just a fraction of the total waste recycled. There are three landfills in Qatar – Umm Al-Afai catering to bulky and domestic waste, Rawda Rashed for construction and demolition waste, and Al-Krana for sewage wastes. However, landfills are the least-favoured waste management option on the waste hierarchy defined by United Nations Environment Programme. Additionally, such a method of disposal by landfill is not a practical solution for a country like Qatar, where land availability is limited.

Recognising the need for a solution to the increasing generation of waste, since 2008 Qatar has tackled the issue by following a plan contained in its National Development Strategies (**NDS**) to manage waste generated across all sectors. This article reviews Qatar's waste management strategy by providing a background to the National Development Strategies, the targets set within the strategies and resultant projects, and also reviews relevant laws which have been put in place.

Qatar's waste management strategy

In October 2008, the General Secretariat for Development Planning in the State of Qatar released a development plan titled Qatar National Vision (**QNV**) 2030. QNV 2030 was organised into four pillars: human development, social development, economic development and environmental development. QNV 2030 identifies the need for sustainable development in order to balance the interests of the current generation with the interests of future generations, and emphasises the need for preventive measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Qatar also prepared the NDS to serve as supplementary development plans to QNV 2030. NDS 2011-2016 (**NDS-1**) was the first comprehensive development strategy. NDS-1 for the first time explicitly aligned the growth of national prosperity to the realities of environmental constraints. Amongst various specific actions

to enhance environmental protection, NDS-1 put into place three key waste management targets: 1) establish a solid waste management plan that would strongly emphasise recycling, 2) increase the current percentage of recycled solid waste from the then current 8% to 38%, and 3) contain domestic waste generation at 1.6 kilogrammes per capita per day.

The progress made towards the main outcomes and targets of the NDS-1 was thereafter reviewed and evaluated, and analysed in Qatar's second NDS.

NDS 2017-2022 (**NDS-2**) further emphasises the need to conserve the environment and focuses on the use of waste recycling techniques in support of infrastructure projects. NDS-2 acknowledges that NDS-1's target to establish a solid waste management plan, and recycle 38% of solid waste were not achieved because they were too ambitious, and therefore they have been adjusted in NDS-2. The third target was achieved as Qatar managed to contain domestic waste generation at 1.3 kg per capita/day.

Accordingly, NDS-2 revised the targets on waste management. The two revised targets identified are to fix the domestic waste generation rate to under 1.6 kg per capita/day during the period 2018-2022, and recycle 15% of the solid waste generated by the end of 2022.

Projects and activities in support of the targets were implemented, including the opening of a domestic solid waste management center at Mesaieed (which is also the first integrated solid waste facility in the Middle East) in 2011; establishing four waste transport stations in October 2011; the launch of a tyre recycling project in Umm Al Afai in 2012 (with a recycling rate of more than 60%); the adoption of a number of construction specifications that include recycled materials; and the development and issuance of national instructions on the management of medical and radioactive waste. In December 2019, the Ministry of Municipality and Environment (**MME**) also signed a cooperation agreement with the Qatar Primary Materials Company to recycle construction waste at the Rawdat Rashed landfill which has about 40 million tonnes of construction waste.

NDS-2 further identifies projects which would contribute towards Qatar's environmental sustainability and adopts a collaborative approach to address construction waste, by involving government departments, research organisations and industry. Projects identified in the strategy include specialized environmental studies to assess the rates and characteristics of industrial waste, and establish an integrative system for industrial waste treatment. As per the strategy, the implementing agency is the MME which is to be supported by Ashgal, Qatar General Organization for Standards and Metrology, and Qatar University.

NDS-2 also tasks the MME to develop legislation to encourage the recycling of waste that would also include methods of dealing with waste, binding ratios, incentives and penalties.

Legal regime around waste management

An early piece of legislation which preceded the current plans is Qatar's Law No. 30 of 2002, titled "Environmental Protection Law". This establishes general provisions for the protection of the environment in Qatar. Under Article 32, it is prohibited to throw, discharge, treat or burn refuse and liquid or solid wastes, except in the specified locations located far from residential, industrial, agricultural and water effluents. The Article states that it is the Executive Regulations which shall determine the specifications for refuse and waste locations and that relevant administrative authorities shall treat waste and refuse within their jurisdiction as provided for in the Executive Regulations. The Legislation also prohibits the import of hazardous materials.

In 2019, the cabinet approved a draft law on the treatment and recycling of waste. The draft law includes provisions concerning the types of waste and materials that may be recycled, the controls on their circulation, management, processing, recycling or disposal at home or abroad, as well as the cases of

revocation or suspension of the license, the stages of waste treatment and regulation and the conditions that must be met at waste treatment sites and facilities. However, perhaps owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and its ensuing result of reduced parliamentary sittings, this draft law is yet to be passed.

Qatar has also signed and ratified the Basel Convention that aims to protect the environment against the adverse effects of hazardous wastes.

Conclusion

On the whole, Qatar appears to be gearing up to meet the challenge posed by waste management by deploying waste management targets, identifying agencies that the MME can collaborate with, investing heavily in the projects discussed above, implementing specific legislation on waste management, and sourcing new technologies.

Over the next few years, Qatar is likely to come under increasing scrutiny in the run up to the FIFA World Cup. Consequently, it can be anticipated that implementation will be given a greater priority.

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