

QATAR'S FIFA WORLD CUP 2022: SUSTAINABILITY AND FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

The FIFA World Cup 2022 has been being held in Qatar following doubts and criticisms surrounding the mega-event. It is the first time the world's biggest football tournament held in the Middle Eastern country. Apart the success of the mega-event, Qatar has ambition to project its foreign policy through the FIFA World Cup driven by its National Vision 2030. This paper describes the sustainability sides of the Qatar's FIFA World Cup and the tiny country's foreign policy to achieve human, social, economic, and environmental development. Hosting the FIFA World Cup provides opportunities for the nation to gain knowledge and technology transfer in term of sustainable infrastructures and global mega-sport management, promote the values and cultures of Qatari society, enhance economic diversification, and embolden its international role in promoting and championing sustainable development and all of which correspond to the development emphasized on its National Vision 2030.

Key words: Qatar, FIFA World Cup, sustainability, foreign policy, Qatar National Vision 2030.

Introduction

The FIFA World Cup 2022 has been being held in Qatar, a gas-rich country and the first country in the Middle East to host the football-focused sport mega-event. Qatar was named as the World Cup 2022 host after its determined bidding effort surpassing other bidding countries, such as the United States, South Korea, Japan, and Australia. As soon as it was announced to secure the place in 2010, the Qatari government has invested a lot to prepare the world's tournament, from the provision of the FIFA's standardized stadiums to the world's class supporting infrastructures. Qatar has spent an estimated amount of \$220 billion - most of which has been used to build the supporting infrastructures in stead of the stadiums, for instances, public transport facilities, hotels,

etc. – to hold the mega-event which makes it be the most expensive football games in the World Cup history.

Table 1.

Estimated Investment Cost for the World Cup Events¹

FIFA World Cup	Estimated Investment Cost
Qatar’s FIFA World Cup 2022	\$220 billion
Russia’s FIFA World Cup 2018	\$11.6 billion
Brazil’s FIFA World Cup 2014	\$15 billion
South Africa’s FIFA World Cup 2010	\$3.6 billion

Despite doubts coming against Qatar whether the global sport event would be running smoothly as it is just a tiny country with a small number of citizens, little football history, and unfriendly weather, the Qatar’s FIFA World Cup seems to be one of the most successful World Cup events. Further, the Qatar’s FIFA World Cup has been campaigned as a women-friendly and family-friendly World Cup as well as the safest World Cup.²

Sustainability Sides of Qatar’s FIFA World Cup 2022

In order to host a number football matches during the World Cup 2022, Qatar has built seven new stadiums and renovated one existing stadium which all meet the FIFA’s requirements. The iconic Lusail Stadium in Doha, for example, has been named as one of the most luxurious retractable-roof stadiums in the world.³ Not only do the stadiums apply the cultural and Islamic values of Qatari society and modernity to their architectures, but they also implement the principles of sustainability which is a current

¹ Front Office Sports, “The Most Expensive World Cup in History,” April 10, 2022, <https://frontofficesports.com/the-most-expensive-world-cup-in-history/>.

² Qatar Tribune, “Safest World Cup,” December 12, 2022, <https://www.qatar-tribune.com/article/38042/nation/safest-world-cup>.

³ Daily Mail, “While Investors Are Put off by Crumbling Old Trafford, Beckham Is Building a Stunning £766m Miami Base and Barcelona Are Spending £540m on the Nou Camp... These 10 Stadiums Put the ‘Theatre of Dreams’ to Shame,” February 20, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-8005891/While-Old-Trafford-rots-ten-best-football-stadiums-set-built-world.html>.

global trend in the world's mega-structure development. The international sport organization like the FIFA has been taking part in tackling the climate crisis by having required the FIFA World Cup hosts to provide sustainable stadiums since 2012.⁴

That the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) standard was adopted to each stadium in term of GSAS design and build (minimum a 4-star certification), construction management (minimum a class-A certification), and operation (minimum a Gold-predicate certification) has made the Qatar's FIFA World Cup stadiums be the most sustainable stadiums used for the football tournament. As the stadiums are located within the reachable distances, the World Cup fans would be able to attend multiple football matches on the same day in addition to the availability of integrated transport system. Thus, the World Cup is not supposed to contribute to the traffic jam as the fans can use public transport in stead of private vehicles. The compact nature of the Qatar's World Cup 2022 will also reduce the tournament's carbon footprint and help FIFA and Qatar achieve their vision of delivering the first carbon-neutral FIFA World Cup.⁵ Regarding such purpose, the Qatar's World Cup 2022 is in line with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

⁴ FIFA, "Sustainable Building: Sustainable Stadiums and Offices," accessed December 17, 2022, <https://publications.fifa.com/en/sustainability-report/environmental-pillar/sustainable-building/sustainable-stadiums-and-offices/>.

⁵ Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy - State of Qatar, "FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022: Frequently Asked Questions," 2022, <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/faq>.

Table 2.Qatar's FIFA World Cup Stadiums and Sustainability Certification⁶

Stadium	GSAS Design & Build	GSAS Construction Management	GSAS Operations
Al Bayt	5 stars (March 2020)	A* (March 2020)	Platinum (September 2022)
Al Janoub	4 stars (April 2019)	A* (April 2019)	Gold (March 2022)
Al Thumama	5 stars (April 2022)	A* (February 2022)	Gold (September 2022)
Education City	5 stars (January 2020)	A* (January 2020)	Gold (August 2022)
Khalifa International	4 stars (November 2017)	A* (November 2017)	Gold (July 2022)
Ahmed Bin Ali	4 stars (August 2020)	A* (August 2020)	Gold (August 2022)
Lusail	5 stars (August 2022)	A* (February 2022)	Not targeted
Stadium 974	5 stars (August 2022)	A* (April 2022)	Not targeted

⁶ FIFA, "Sustainable Building: Sustainable Stadiums and Offices."

Table 3.Sustainability Facts of Qatar’s FIFA World Cup 2022⁷

Sustainability Side	Description
30% more energy efficient than international benchmarks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive energy efficiency features: thick insulation and smart site orientation. • Active energy efficiency features: efficient cooling and ventilation systems, LED lighting and state-of-the-art buildings control systems.
Green landscaping creates a cooling effect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 850,000m² of new green space, equivalent to 121 full-sized football pitches. • More than 16,000 trees. • Water-efficient plants. • Green spaces irrigated using recycled water. • Habitats for native birds, lizards and other fauna.
40% less water used than international benchmarks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water vapor collected from the cooling system will be used for irrigation. • Recycled water used for dust suppression. • Efficient fixtures for sinks, showers and WCs.
Modular design means 170,000 stadium seats can be donated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stadiums easily dismantled thanks to modular design. • Ease of disassembly facilitates reuse and relocation. • Ras Abu Aboud Stadium will be completely disassembled. FIFA World Cup demands massive seating capacity compared to Qatar’s local needs. • Countries in need of sporting infrastructure will receive stadium seats post-2022.
Stadiums will be operational year-round post-2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retractable roofs and cooling technology for year-round use. • Stadiums to be reused by the community as hospitals, schools, places of worship and hotels, running, cycling and horse-riding tracks, and other sporting facilities.
Construction waste reused or recycled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of waste generated at Al Janoub and Al Rayyan stadiums reused or recycled.

⁷ Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy - State of Qatar, “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™: Sustainable Stadiums” (Doha, 2022), <https://www.qatar2022.qa/sites/default/files/2022-08/FIFA-World-Cup-Qatar-2022™-Sustainable-Stadiums-EN.pdf>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stadiums designed for effective waste management during operation. • Waste segregation and recycling on site. • Wastewater recycled from on-site workers' accommodation for dust control and toilet flushing.
All stadiums are pursuing sustainability certifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability certification measures design, construction and operation stages. • Energy canters are rated for efficient design and operation by the seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER).
Public transport brings fans to stadiums.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doha Metro is fast, cost-effective and environmentally friendly. • Trams and buses connect car parks to stadiums. • Extensive network of pedestrian and bicycle pathways. • Shaded pathways connect buildings and car parks, helping to further encourage walking. • Bicycle racks near building entrances and pedestrian crossings.
Sustainably sourced construction materials are a priority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of building supplies from recycled materials. • Using local resources supports Qatar's economy and investments. • Indoor spaces finished with non-toxic paint. • Light-colored exteriors minimize heat retention and urban heat island effect.

Table 4.

Qatar's FIFA World Cup 2022 and The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals⁸

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals	Description
Goal 3: Good Health & Wellbeing	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainable Qatar 2022 stadiums feature improved lighting, better air quality and greenery, which are proven to positively influence occupants' health and wellbeing.
Goal 7: Affordable & Clean Energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Energy efficient stadiums use up to 40% less energy than international (ASHRAE 90.1) benchmarks.
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using cutting-edge technology and innovation - such as super efficient cooling systems and light fixtures - means the Qatar 2022 stadiums are resilient and adaptable in the face of our changing global climate.
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities	Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Qatar 2022 stadiums are at the center of some of the country's new sustainable community hubs, with over 1 million m² of new public space being created.
Goal 12: Responsible Consumption & Production	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stadium construction uses recycled and locally sourced materials wherever possible. The construction minimizes construction waste, as well as reusing and recycling up to 85% of waste materials. The stadiums are also designed for effective waste management during operation.
Goal 13: Climate Action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Qatar 2022 stadiums' green designs are energy efficient. Furthermore, as part of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 carbon neutrality commitment, the

⁸ Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy - State of Qatar.

stadiums acquire carbon credits to offset carbon emissions during construction.

Goal 15: Life on Land

Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

- The Qatar 2022 stadiums use recycled water for irrigation, dust control and toilets, reducing the demand for potable water by up to 40%. The landscaping features use local low-water-consumption plants and will provide new habitats for native birds and reptiles.
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FIFA World Cup and Qatar's Foreign Policy

Football is not just a sport as it encompasses social, cultural and political aspect of a nation.⁹ To Qatar, the World Cup is more than a mega-sport event. Qatar has had the National Vision 2030 to pursue state development comprising four pillars; human development, social development, economic development, and environmental development. The vision provides a framework in which national strategies and implementation plan can be developed to meet the defined long-term outcomes.¹⁰ The framework acts as a guideline for Qatar's domestic development and foreign policy.

⁹ Luerdi Luerdi, "Tidak Sekedar Sepak Bola," *Riau Pos*, June 16, 2014, <https://doi.org/https://osf.io/utp2b/>.

¹⁰ Saad Al-Hitmi, "Qatar – Economic Diversification in Qatar National Vision 2030," n.d., https://unfccc.int/files/cooperation_support/response_measures/application/pdf/new_qatar_national_vision_2030.pdf

Table 5.Qatar National Vision 2030¹¹

Human Development	An Educated Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A world-class educational system that equips citizens to meet the needs of Qatar’s society.• A national network of formal and non-formal educational programs that equip Qatari children and youth to contribute to the society.• Empower institutions operating under centrally-determined guidelines.• An effective system for funding scientific research conducted in cooperation with specialized international organizations.• A significant international role in cultural and intellectual activity and scientific research.
	A Healthy Population: Physically and Mentally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A comprehensive world-class healthcare system whose services are accessible to the whole population.• An integrated system of health care under the direction of a national health policy that sets and monitors standards of health care.• A skilled national workforce capable of providing high quality health services.• Continued commitment by the state to provide sufficient funds for maintaining the health of Qatar’s population.
	A Capable and Motivated Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased and diversified participation of Qataris in the workforce.• Targeted participation of expatriate labor.• Recruitment of the right mix of expatriate labor, protecting their rights, securing their safety, and retaining those who are outstanding among them.
Social Development	Social Care and Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong cohesive families that care for their members, and maintain moral and religious values and humanitarian ideals.

¹¹ Saad Al-Hitmi.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective social protection system for all Qataris that ensures their civil rights, values their contribution in developing their society, and ensures an adequate income.
	A Sound Social Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective public institutions and active civil society organizations.
	International Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatar will continue to build upon its role in the international community in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An increased regional role economically, politically and culturally, particularly within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference. - Intensification of cultural exchange with the Arab peoples in particular and with other nations in general. - Sponsorship and support of dialogue among civilizations, promoting coexistence between different religions and cultures. - Contribution towards attaining internal peace and security and fulfilling international commitments.
Economic Development	Sound Economic Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable and sustained rates of economic growth that secure a high standard of living for this generation and for future generations. • Financial and economic stability characterized by low inflation rates, sound financial policy and a secure and efficient financial system. • A stimulating business climate capable of attracting foreign funds and technologies and of encouraging national investments. • Open and flexible economic structures capable of competing in a changing world. • Coordination with Gulf Cooperation Council states and with Arab and regional economic organizations to establish trade, investment and financial ties.
	Responsible Exploitation of Oil and Gas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimum exploitation of hydrocarbon resources, establishing a balance between reserves and production, and between economic diversification and the degree of depletion. • A vigorous oil and gas sector that generates advanced technological innovations and contributes to the development of human resources and economic capacities throughout Qatar.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fully developed gas industry that provides a major source of clean energy for Qatar and for the world. • The long-term maintenance of strategic reserves of oil and gas to meet the needs of national security and sustainable development.
	Suitable Economic Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diversified economy that gradually reduces its dependence on hydrocarbon industries, enhances the role of the private sector and maintains its competitiveness through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion of industries and services with competitive advantages derived from hydrocarbon industries. - Design and development of economic activities in which Qatar can specialize, including the technical and human requirements of these activities. - A knowledge-based economy characterized by innovation; entrepreneurship; excellence in education; a world-class infrastructural backbone; the efficient delivery of public services; and transparent and accountable government.
Environmental Development	A Balance Between Development Needs and Protecting the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserving and protecting the environment, including air, land, water and biological diversity, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An environmentally aware population that values the preservation of the natural heritage of Qatar and its neighboring states. - An agile and comprehensive legal system that protects all elements of the environment, responding quickly to challenges as they arise. - Effective and sophisticated environmental institutions that build and strengthen public awareness about environmental protection, and encourage the use of environmentally sound technologies. These institutions will also conduct awareness raising campaigns, employ environmental planning tools, and carry out environmental research. • A comprehensive urban development plan for Qatar that adopts a sustainable policy with regard to urban expansion and population distribution. • Encouragement of regional cooperation to put in place preventive measures to mitigate and adapt to the negative environmental effects of pollution arising from development activities.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A proactive and significant international role in assessing the impact of climate change and adapting to and mitigating its negative impacts, especially on countries of the Gulf.
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The Qatar's FIFA World Cup is a tool of foreign policy for the country to pursue several interests driven by the National Vision 2030, such as knowledge and technology transfer, promotion of Qatari society values and cultures, enhancement of economic diversification, emboldening international role to address climate crisis.

Knowledge and Technology Transfer

It is the first time for Qatar to host the FIFA World Cup which will definitely bring experience to the Qatari government and stakeholders. The success of such mega-event will raise credit for the tiny gulf nation to host other international mega-events in the future. In addition to credit from international communities, knowledge and technology transfer is something else the country attempts to pursue. As discussed in the previous part, it is mandatory that the hosts have capability of providing sustainable stadiums and supporting infrastructures for the World Cup kick offs. The Qatari government has welcomed internationally-recognized human capitals to collaborate to build the stadiums. Through the cooperation schemes, the knowledge and technology transfer become possible in which the Qatari individuals and corporates can take advantage of the World Cup in term of integrating sustainability principles into mega-structures at home. Also, the nation will be able to learn the mega-sports management so that it will be ready to host other sports mega-events other than the World Cup. This purpose corresponds to the human development pillar of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Promotion of Qatari Society Values and Cultures

Hosting the World Cup 2022 provide opportunities for Qatar to introduce the values and cultures living in the societies. Qatar facilitates the interactions of million fans from various countries during the World Cup. The most phenomenal cultural promotion during the Qatar's World Cup 2022 can be the stadiums' designs resembling the cultural heritages of Qatari society. In addition, through the world's tournament the nation attempts to promote the inclusiveness and openness complying with modernity which is expected to counter the negative images on the Middle Eastern nations. The pillar of

social development of the Qatar National Vision 2030 emphasizes that the country is supposed to build upon its role in international community to promote mutual understanding and respect as well as co-existence despite inevitable diversity and through which international peace and security can be attained.

Enhancement of Economic Diversification.

Qatar is one of the world's oil and gas producers and exporters. The hydrocarbon industry has been contributing a lot to the nation's economic development for many years. However, the industry is deemed to have caused global challenge like climate crisis and there has been increasing global demand for energy transition. Realizing this trend, Qatar cannot rely on the industry to sustain its economic development in the future. Therefore, the Qatari government has been attempting to create opportunities of various economic models, for example, sports and leisure industry in line with the pillar of economic development in the Qatar National Vision 2030. Such effort is taken to gradually reduce its dependence on the hydrocarbon industry. The World Cup is one form of economic initiatives which the nation has created to attract international attention, so that more tourists will make their visit to Qatar. In other words, the Qatar's World Cup is meant to promote the nation tourism sector. With the existing infrastructures, Qatar will also host the incoming Asian Cup and it is reported that the country has expressed its willingness to host the Olympic Games 2032.¹²

Emboldening International Role in Responding to Climate Crisis

Environmental sustainability has been increasingly present on Qatar's policy agenda since the early 2000s thanks to development of the domestic institutions.¹³ The pillar of environmental development in the Qatar National Vision 2030 guides the nation

¹² Aljazeera, "Qatar Announces Plan to Bid for 2032 Olympic Games," July 27, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2020/7/27/qatar-announces-plan-to-bid-for-2032-olympic-games>.

¹³ Reem Al-Hababi, "The Evolvement of Qatar's Environmental Sustainability Policy: The Strategies, Regulations, and Institutions," in *Sustainable Qatar: Social, Political and Environmental Perspectives*, ed. Logan Cochrane and Reem Al-Hababi (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 17-35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7398-7>.

to both balance its domestic economic growth and environmental protection and play its international role to address climate crisis. The country has been implementing green development in various sectors through the National Climate Change Action Plan to reduce green house gas emission in all sectors by 25% by 2030¹⁴, consisting of the long-term strategies being pursued to respond effectively to the climate crisis in the forms of research, smart cities, green transport, clean energy, and green infrastructures.¹⁵ Regarding the infrastructures, the Qatar's World Cup has demonstrated to the rest of the world the nation's commitment to environmental sustainability by adopting green technology when hosting the mega-event. Qatar has ambition to embolden its leadership to be an active global actor in promoting and championing sustainability – a global norm encouraged by the United Nations – in the region of Middle East and beyond by retaining engagements and partnerships with international communities – states and non-states – to pursue the UN SDGs, including environmental sustainability.

Final Remark

Sports events are often used by countries to deliver message on what they are pursuing. In the case of the FIFA World Cup, Qatar which has previously faced some doubts has shown its capability to host the mega-event. The Qatar's FIFA World Cup acts as one of important initiatives and strategies stipulated in the National Vision 2030 comprising a few pillars of development for the gulf nation in which sustainable development has been its national agenda. Despite controversies around the Qatar's FIFA World Cup like the issue of workers' deaths during the infrastructure construction and a few protests coming from individual athletes, politicians, and media from western countries against the Qatari government and FIFA's rule to ban the LGBT+ symbols and alcohol in the stadium, the nation has gained support from the rest of the world and it

¹⁴ Qatar News Agency, "Environment Minister Underlines Climate Change Is National Priority for Qatar," September 4, 2022, <https://www.qna.org.qa/en/News-Area/News/2022-09/04/0045-environment-minister-underlines-climate-change-is-national-priority-for-qatar>.

¹⁵ Ministry of Municipality and Environment - State of Qatar, "Qatar National Climate Change Action Plan 2030" (Doha, 2021), <https://www.mme.gov.qa/pdocs/cview?siteID=2&docID=23349&year=2021>.

seems to forward its stronger ambition by hosting other mega-events in the future as well as by maintaining its engagements with international community, especially in addressing climate crisis. The Qatar's FIFA World Cup 2022 will leave a legacy of sustainability to the nation particularly and the region generally.

About the Author

The author is a doctoral student in International Relations, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. His research interest is in the field of politics and international relations, mainly in the areas of foreign policy and para-diplomacy with the issues surrounding defense and security, environmental and health politics, and global urban politics.

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