



Accessible  Qatar  
a **sasol** initiative

# ACCESSIBLE QATAR 2017 CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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# 1- Introduction

Supported by Qatar Tourism Authority, Sasol partnered with Project Qatar, to organize the two day “Accessible Qatar Conference” on 8 and 9 May 2017 at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. Held under the patronage of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani, the conference aimed at raising awareness on accessibility and to influence project managers and other professionals towards making their existing and future venues more accessible. The conference, which brought together global experts of accessibility in different fields, was a unique networking opportunity for professionals in Qatar and the GCC to discuss specific issues related to accessibility, and benefit from the global best practices and the most recent trends of accessibility. Over two days, the conference examined global concepts and identified different approaches and initiatives for sustainable accessible tourism; accessible architectural designs and implementation. It looked into ways to improve fan experience for people with disabilities in preparation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup that’s accessible for all. The conference discussed accessibility inside the work place and showcased accessibility implementation in theme parks, as well as highlighting the importance of communication in promoting accessibility.

The outcome of the conference and its recommendations will pave the way towards a more accessible Qatar, and will hopefully boost accessibility efforts in the region.

## 2- The Conference

### a) Inaugural Session

#### **Nasser al-Maslamani**

Nasser al-Maslamani, QTA director of planning and quality

Mr. Al-Maslamani highlighted the significance attached to accessibility in the hospitality sector in the country, noting that QTA will be working with Accessible Qatar's experts to analyse the accessibility of the exhibitions that take place in Qatar, with the view to ensuring that business events that are licensed by QTA are accessible to all.

He said that QTA is determined to ensure that one of the legacies of the 2022 FIFA World Cup should be an authentic, thriving, sustainable and accessible tourism sector.

He pointed out that the hotel grading and classification system places accessibility guidelines, drafted in accordance with international best practices, at the core of development plans for all hospitality establishments in the country. For the first time in Qatar, the number of stars a hotel has is directly affected by how accessible it is.

He said that licensing and inspection teams completed their onsite inspections of all 4\* and 5\* hotels in the country by the end of last year, and that they're working on completing the inspection of all 3\*, 2\* and 1\* hotels, and that by 2018, they will complete the inspections of all hotel apartments.

He acknowledged that the new QTA guidelines mandate that hospitality staff members are trained to manage and meet the requirements and expectations of guests with additional needs, He affirmed QTA's commitment to supporting Accessible Qatar.

#### **Mr. Phinda Vilakazi**

Mr. Phinda Vilakazi, President GTL Ventures, SASOL

Phinda Vilakazi , President of GTL Ventures of Sasol said that Accessible Qatar has audited around 100 venues across Qatar including venues in retail, hospitality, tourism and public parks, by trained accessibility experts.

He added that the Accessible Qatar app has provided the disabled community with essential information as well as raising public awareness on the need for places to be accessible.

He noted that the App was developed by Sasol in partnership with the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, Qatar Tourism Authority and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, among other institutions.

Sasol conducted many focus groups with local disability groups in the community to ensure the App and the information provided within it met user needs and requirements.

He revealed that Accessible Qatar app won Sasol the World Summit Award in the Inclusion & Empowerment Category.

The desired outcome of the conference will be to encourage project managers, contractors, construction managers and other professionals to be inspired and engage in making existing and future venues accessible to all.

## b) Accessible Tourism For All

SESSION HOSTED BY QATAR TOURISM AUTHORITY

The session examined global concepts and identified new approaches and initiatives for sustainable accessible tourism. It looks at marketing strategies to make cities and countries more attractive and viable for people with disabilities, and the necessary steps to improve, maintain and develop consistent accessibility efforts throughout.

### **Abdulla G. Ali**

Senior Manager, Terminal Operations, Hamad International Airport.

Mr. Ali said that Hamad International Airport (HIA) offers barrier-free access and dedicated facilities to passengers who require special assistance and that in 2015 HIA successfully handled an average of 30,000 Passengers with Restricted Mobility (PRM) per month on 10,000 flights and that the number exceeded 39,000 PRM passengers per month on 11,500 flights in 2016.

Evacuation chairs were launched a year ago and trained 800 staff on how to use them

He explained all types of accessibility support in all sections of the airport, noting that HIA is dedicated to continuous improvement and exploring further improvements to assist the growing community of disabled passengers.

As for the future, the landside initiatives include creating passenger help points and more accessible transport. At the terminal level, HIA initiatives include introducing induction loops to aid people with hearing impairments, and washroom improvements including automatic doors, additional support railings and emergency alarms.

### **Isabella Menichini**

Head of Tourism and Marketing, Milan Municipality, Italy

From Milan, the most accessible city in Europe, Isabella Menichini explained the steps taken by the city for EXPO Milan 2015, and all the efforts taken since then, in a participatory approach to remove all physical barriers to accessibility, from public places and buildings, in spite of funding and structural challenges.

Isabella stressed the importance of the access committee, combining representatives of associations and the public workers to identify priorities and respond to the needs of PWD. She mentioned some of the achievements, such as increasing the number of accessible taxis and providing real time information about the status of public transport.

She highlighted the challenges, especially the lack of public funding for accessibility, the high cost of introducing Wifi access throughout the city and improving the accessibility of public schools.

## Kijima Hideto

Director, Japan Accessible Center, Japan

Kijima who has visited 157 countries shared his experience and talked about his travel adventures and the different approaches to accessibility from the perspective of a wheelchair user.

He called for creating new markets which caters for the needs of PWD, enabling them to travel for business meetings, conferences, study, weddings, visit graves, attend concerts, shopping, and enjoy their daily life.

He said that generally PWD travellers travel off the peak season, stay longer in the same place, and they do not tend to travel alone, which means that they often spend more.

He urged the organizers of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to give enough space for PWD and allow them to enjoy the games through an inclusive approach.

He noted that everybody has some kind of difficulty when they go to another country, everybody will become a minority somewhere, and he wishes everyone is able to travel to wherever they want to go.

## Bill Forrester

Founder, TravAbility Travel, Australia

Bill Forrester, the founder of TravAbility Travel quoted that accessible tourism will represent 25% of inclusive tourism by 2020, and that PWD stay longer and spend more.

He noted that disability is the only minority group anyone can join in an instant, and the tourism operators should be keen to develop a service suitable for disabled travellers.

He explained that accessibility is a product and that businesses will enjoy return customers if they respect and meet disabled travellers needs and requirements.

This new market calls for innovation, adaptive equipment both indoor and outdoor. Bill believes this is worth the investment and should be considered by tour operators.

He called for changing the mindsets and adopt six steps: Throw away disability action plans, look at travellers with a disability as customers, consider accessible tourism as a business opportunity, develop accessible products and remember the small things (like food trays for wheelchair users), develop destination-wide thinking and include accessibility as part of mainstream marketing.

## Martin Heng

Accessible Travel Manager and Editorial Adviser at Lonely Planet, Australia

With a billion tourists by 2030, and the United Nations calling for inclusive cities and transport systems through their Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG11), Mr. Martin suggested following Japan's example in applying universal design prior to hosting the 2020 Olympics.

He warned businesses that they are losing customers because their websites are not accessible, relevant information on accessibility is unavailable on the homepages and hidden under FAQ, and what's worse, is that employees do not know how to answer questions about accessibility.

He revealed important data, showing that 71% of customers with access needs will ignore a website that's difficult to use, amounting to £11 billion of lost business in UK alone (10% of online business).

He stressed that accessibility is a matter of staff training not only equipment and accessibility aids, noting that accessible toilets are often used for storage.

He said that even professional hotel booking sites do not explain the status of hotel accessibility, and nobody can guarantee the reservation for an accessible room. Disabled guests are often reliant on speaking directly to the hotel to confirm an accessible room booking.

He praised Accessible Qatar for catering for different disabilities especially as more than 1/3 of impairments are invisible.

## c) Accessible Designs & Implementation – Eden Project Case Study

SESSION HOSTED BY: QATAR GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL



Discussing physical design but also incorporating the 'accessibility chain' i.e. importance of pre-visit information, Changing Places facilities for adults and children, accessible concerts and 'relaxed' entry to their seasonal programme which is particularly geared to children with disabilities such as autism.

### Jane Stoneham

Director, Sensory Trust (Eden Project Partner)

Jane Stoneham explained the approach of Sensory Trust in creating the inclusive entertainment park (Eden project) in UK. She said that everybody's right to have a great time requires different types of experience.

She explained that an early consideration of accessibility will save a lot of time and money. The addition of accessibility features from the concept design stage will be more efficient and cost effective than amending designs at later stages.

A successful inclusive project will require training of the design team, work with disabled people, and have clear targets.

She gave practical examples of inclusive projects at Eden Project, including holding special sessions for children with autism and other types of disabilities (including distributing balloons to deaf children to enjoy concerts).

She noted that inclusivity at the Eden Project has many benefits, including increasing the number of satisfied visitors, being cost effective and reflecting a positive profile for supporting a diverse range of visitors.

She revealed the key for successful inclusive projects is to have inclusive designs and adopt an integrated, creative and collaborative approach, by working with people of different ages, disabilities, artists, designers and the community.

## d) How To Improve Fan Experience For People With Disabilities

SESSION HOSTED BY: SUPREME COMMITTEE FOR DELIVERY & LEGACY



اللجنة العليا  
للمشاريع واليرث  
Supreme Committee  
for Delivery & Legacy

The session offered a case study on different elements and new development ideas on making the 2022 FIFA World Cup accessible for all. It analysed how to budget for implementation and creating access at any venue for all, and create attractive financial packages to entice persons with disabilities to be involved in more sporting events, as well as providing accessible route to the sport activities.

### Najla Al Obaidan

Senior Architect, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy

Najla Al Obaidan, a Senior Architect at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, said inclusive design is being implemented in all the stadiums being constructed for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. She said that accessibility is at the core of the design of the venues, and the committee looked into 16 accessibility standards, in addition to taking in consideration the importance of respecting Qatari cultural and social values.

She revealed that disabled fans will have the best possible view at the stadium, and that their seat design and location is based on FIFA standards. In addition, there are also places allocated for media with disabilities as well as for people with autism or similar developmental conditions.

She confirmed that all types of PWD will have an equal opportunity to enjoy the football matches.

The committee is already applying some innovative ways to enrich the experience of PWDs as they're enabling people with autism to watch the Emir Cup and the Gulf Cup in illuminated rooms with less noise, which caters for their needs.

### Ameer Al Mulla

Executive Director, Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC)

Ameer Al Mulla shared Qatar's experience in hosting the 2015 IPC Athletics World Championships in which athletes with disabilities from around the world competed for the first time in an Arab country. He detailed all the steps which led to that successful event: the amendment of hundreds of hotel rooms, coordinating with the airport, equipping buses, adding lifts to the stadium, equipping the press room to accommodate journalists with disabilities and recruit 683 volunteers to assist the athletes and prevent any incidents.

He mentioned that during the meetings held with hotel managers (to furnish more than 350 accessible hotel rooms) the experts stressed that equipping any room will not affect any hotel's business but will make it usable by PWD as well as other guests.

Mr. Al Mulla considered the 2015 IPC as a good prelude for future events and that the lessons learned will definitely promote accessibility and inclusiveness in all types of sports.

## Mark Todd

Senior Architect, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy

Mark Todd, Principle Accessibility Consult, Access All Areas UK said the principle of universal accessible design should take three elements into consideration: equality, dignity and functionality.

He said that segregation of disabled people and those with accessibility needs must be avoided at all times and that PWDs should enjoy the same experience of their peers.

To this expert, accessibility should be universal and all parts of the stadium, facilities, services, and sports should be accessible to everyone, noting that attention to details is very important.

Accessibility should start in the mind of decision makers, and be reflected within the designers and planners; instead of looking for the percentage of accessible seats, it's beneficial to make an accessible design which can serve everybody, those who need specific accessibility and those who do not.

Mark gave many practical examples from London 2012 Olympic games, where huge space was allocated to wheelchair users and their families and friends, to ensure a fully inclusive experience, with the good view of each type of sports.

This spirit of inclusion was reflected in the additional services in the ticketing process by allocating additional seats for companions, and allowing for space for guide dogs. Many volunteers took the lead in accompanying PWD, to their seats if they requested this type of assistance.

He even noted that a variety of different accessible toilet facilities were provided including unisex toilets to enable someone of the opposite sex to assist.

With a legacy of accessibility efforts for over 25 years, everybody was expecting UK games to be accessible, while the lack of planning in Sochi 2014 lead to some mistakes and Rio 2016 witnessed many improvements.

To him, who's advising on Tokyo 2020, we can all learn, but we should not be impatient.

## Guy Davies

Managing Director, Disability Solutions (Pty) South Africa

Guy Davies, the managing director of Disability Solutions in South Africa took us through the preparations of South Africa to host the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup.

He said that in line with FIFA regulations, and also the South African constitution, the entire program had to be accessible to all, which means that all existing and new stadiums throughout the country, including Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (Nelson Mandela Bay) needed to be accessible.

The public transport systems were accessible, not just a proportion of seats were allocated to PWD.

He called for adopting an inclusive approach rather than being content with some accessibility elements, noting that the key to end segregation is through embracing universal design rather than designing for people with disabilities.

The key is to get the work done as early as possible to allow enough time for testing and amending. For example, in 2010 the commentary was offered in different languages to enable visually impaired people to enjoy the experience, then the organizers realized that many visitors requested this service, which proves that a good universal design can be beneficial to everyone.

He urged Qatar to train staff and volunteers, and give them first-hand experience on how to deal with different disabilities, from supporting a blind person, to assisting a person using a wheelchair if he/she asks for it. The presence of local people is very important among the staff and volunteers to ensure sure that local culture is respected

## e) Strategies and Best Practices for Creating Accessible Work Environments

SESSION HOSTED BY: MADA



Mada Assistive Technology Centre is a non-profit organization committed to connecting people with disabilities to the world of Information and Communication Technology, as well as to improve the digital inclusion for persons with disabilities in the State of Qatar.

This three-voice practical session from Mada officials was an opportunity to highlight best practices and strategies for ensuring workplace accessibility to employees and visitors with different disabilities.

The importance of electronic accessibility was highlighted, and the social impact of employing people with disabilities in meaningful and inclusive roles was discussed.

### **Mohammed Al Fehaida**

Communication & Marketing Officer, Mada Center

Mohammed Al Fehaida, the Communication & Marketing Officer at Mada Center confirmed that people with disabilities do not all have the same needs and that inclusion requires tackling each of these needs. He gave practical examples on how a non-inclusive website would not allow users to read instructions or even use a self-help device.

He gave examples of insufficient efforts, such as creating a wheelchair accessible ATM machine, without enough space for the wheelchair to slide under the panel.

He explained how very small steps can make a difference, from writing a document in word to designing an accessible city.

## Ahmed Habib

Policy Expert, Mada Center

Ahmed Habib, the Policy expert at Mada Center corrected the wrong definitions of disability, stating that it is caused by the way the society is organized, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. He called it the social model of disability, opposed to the medical model which represents the global perception of disability.

He was clear that disability is caused by inaccessibility, and that removing the relevant barriers, would they be physical or electronic, will definitely enhance the user's journey or business.

He said that accessible design is good for everyone, from studies to leisure and work, calling for the governments to subsidize adaptation of workplace to boost the employability of talented and productive PWD.

He gave examples of metro stations and museums which are inclusive and accessible to all, paving the way to a joyful user journey where disabilities disappear.

He noted the importance of law enforcement and regulations, observing that while restaurants are accessible in the West, their franchises do not adopt his approach in Qatar and the GCC as nobody obliges them to.

He warned against teleworking if it's a way to avoid adapting the workplace, not only for wheelchair users but to all types of disabilities.

He concluded that the workforce is losing many productive talents, because they're not equipping the workspace properly, and that the time has come to benefit from the real skills of PWD, not limit them to data entry or phone operator jobs.

## Mike Park

E-Accessibility Expert, Mada Center

Mike Park, the Electronic Accessibility Expert, at Mada Center explained the different phases to reach full accessibility at the digital space, stressing on the importance of having a universally usable interface which responds to the individual needs of every type of disabilities.

Carried out by an assisted technology expert, the assessment of the workspace will look into the employee's capabilities will be assessed with and without assisted technology. The physical workspace will be examined, and the peers' understanding to creating accessible content will be measured, and the appropriate accessibility training requirements will be identified.

Mr. Park gave practical examples of digital accessibility for websites, mobile applications, software, file management, power point presentations, spreadsheets and documents.

He noted that PDF forms aren't accessible for visually impaired users of assisted technology, and that some fonts in word files (such as Arial) will create confusion (and this is one of the reasons for using Verdana font in this report).

## f) Theme Park Accessibility Implementation

With the growing importance of accessible theme parks and entertainment areas, the conference hosted two regional experts to share their views about the importance of theme parks accessibility and the practical steps which are implemented, and share any best practices for the future.

### **Morné Fourie**

Vice President, DXB Entertainments the parent company of Dubai Parks and Resorts, UAE

Morné Fourie, the Vice President of DXB Entertainments the parent company of Dubai Parks and Resorts in the United Arab Emirates highlighted key accessibility features taken into consideration while developing Dubai Parks.

He proved that the parks are striving to receive all, and that their accessibility measures cover the whole range of disabilities, giving them priority rides through Fast Track Entrances, equipping the areas with ramps and/or elevators for Wheelchair Access GWD (Guests with Disabilities), dedicated wheelchair spaces in special effects theatres.

In fact, the Parks are equipped to host guests who are deaf or hard of hearing, guests using wheelchairs, guests with prosthetic limbs, guests using oxygen tanks as well as service animals.

He said that the designers worked to make the parks accessible without stairs, and a huge number of parking lots is allocated to GWD, and that the water taxi is accessible in spite of many challenges (including the fact that water evaporation reaches 4 cm per hour).

In every ride, there is a special seat for GWD, and that all employees have received disability awareness training and are not allowed to touch/handle the customers unless they ask for assistance, reminding us that their corporate promise is to ensure an unforgettable experience to all.

### **Nabil Robert Barakat**

General Manager, AURA Entertainment – KidzMondo Doha

Nabil Barakat, the General Manager of AURA Entertainment which owns KidzMondo Doha talked about their efforts in changing attitudes within their organization, and changing physical features such as the structure of their workspace and recreation areas.

He looked at enhancing accessibility within their organization as another way to increase diversity, and will enable more people to enjoy your facilities and services.

Speaking about the benefits of accessibility in KidzMondo, he revealed that they aim at integrating accessibility standards as an Edutainment concept, and create a more accommodating and a more accessible venue for the less-abled guests.

Furthermore, this will educate children to respect and understand their peers, by playing together in the same playground, which is the ultimate inclusion.

He announced that their group is going to apply the necessary modifications that ensure all parts of the park are accessible, and will further train their staff in disability awareness, in addition to enhance its workspace accessibility to enable disabled people to be employed within the organization.

## g) Media Workshop – The Role Of Communication In Promoting Accessibility

Accessibility to places and its importance for people with disabilities?

Why is accessibility important to business and to Qatar?

How can journalists help?

### Issam Azouri

Communications Advisor

Issam Azouri, the communication adviser accompanying Sasol's Definitely Able and Accessible Qatar since their inception, highlighted the benefits of accessibility and encouraged Doha based media to support this topic.

In addition to being a basic human right, Azouri said that accessibility is needed for studying (school, university, training), working (Public/ Private Sectors), and shopping, as well as for community engagement, entertainment and full participation at social activities.

He noted that PWD and their family and friends control \$8 trillion in annual disposal income, which means that companies have a strong interest in attracting them.

As it makes perfect business sense to create more business, he said that inclusiveness would create new job opportunities, attract new customers and that new products need to be developed.

Azouri said that accessibility is important to Qatar with its new infrastructure, hotels, shopping malls, tourist attractions, parks & recreation venues, international exhibitions, in addition to the 2022 FIFA World cup.

He asked the journalists to understand and support accessibility issues, share their experiences while going around the city and advocate for accessibility.

In exchange, Accessible Qatar can provide them with the necessary training to enable them to become auditors, allow them to participate in audit opportunities and field trips, supply them with regular briefings and share with them a specialized photo gallery, in addition to giving them access to experts and auditors.

## 3- Recommendations

The two days of fruitful discussions and enriching experiences were full of useful recommendations. Here is a list of the main ones, which will be a source of inspiration for the future.

- Ensure that all businesses licensed by QTA take accessibility measures, as this will be reflected in hotel and restaurant rating.
- Develop accessibility maps and information leaflets and distribute them to PWD at key venues across Qatar such as airports and hotels.
- Build the capacity of all people who might deal with PWD.
- Increase the number of accessible venues in Qatar.
- Promote behaviour and cultural change towards PWD.
- Recruit accessibility volunteers who respect and understand the local culture.
- Nurture disability awareness among customer service employees.
- Develop the singing dunes to become part of sensory experience for PWD.
- Lead public campaigns to remove barriers against accessibility, and change mindsets towards disability.
- Incorporate accessibility as part of the design process in all private and public buildings.
- All types of disabilities should be addressed in promoting accessibility.
- Urge website and app developers to implement accessibility measures.
- Include representatives from all types of disabilities in accessibility related decision making.
- Expand Accessible Qatar to other countries in the GCC.
- Develop partnerships with government offices and other facilities.
- Hold specialized conferences to explain to developers and the business community the financial significance of accessibility.