

# Water Availability Management Study Sohar

**WAM in the framework of the socio-economic developments in Oman**

**F**urther to an international water seminar in Oman in the framework of the visit to the Sultanate of His Royal Highness Willem-Alexander, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, in January 2009 a number of Dutch organizations initiated the Water Availability Management (WAM) Study for Sohar. Led by Dacom BV, a solution provider for profitable and sustainable agriculture, the project kicked off in December 2010 in cooperation with Royal Haskoning Nederland B.V., the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Quantitative Water Management at Utrecht University and the PA International Foundation. The study, including recommendations for the further development of Water Availability Management in the Sohar Study Area, was presented to the Omani Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources and the Dutch EVD International in May 2011.

## Sustainability of water resources

The Government of His Majesty the Sultan is acutely aware of the requirement to develop sustainable water resources for a young and growing population in a rapidly internationalising and expanding domestic environment. During the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul in March 2009 the Minister of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources affirmed that the Sultanate has accorded great attention – inspired by the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos – to the water sector. The Minister addressed the Government's efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development: "The Sultanate focused its early efforts on establishing a fully integrated system of a balanced and effective management of water re-

sources. The aim was to ensure sustainability of water resources, meet the development's requirements and achieve a balance between the available water resources against various sectors." The development of appropriate policies and technological approaches through the different Government bodies and institutions and through national and international academic and/or research projects is underway but the major infrastructure and economic development plans suggest that this effort must and will be stepped up.

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### What is WAM?

WAM aims to influence water availability through the implementation of structural and non-structural measures. Its essence is to enhance infiltration, retention and (sub) surface storage of water at times of abundance and to recover this water in times of shortage.

### Why Sohar?

Vision 2020 of the Government of His Majesty the Sultan is well underway. The Port of Sohar is among the best examples of a maturing economy diversifying away from total dependence on oil gas revenues. Arguably many of the industries in Oman's new and thriving Port of Sohar are still energy related – but the Port itself is a direct reflection of Oman's pros-

positioned itself in-between Europe, rather than Arab nations.

A social-democrat Member of the European Parliament recently said: "Of course I am paternalistic. All politicians are paternalistic. You cannot take that away from us because we guard over the people's welfare." His colleagues from all other political groups share that feeling, but obviously roads are split over ways and means to serve society. In virtually all of Europe's nations an intricate web of interest groups, grass root movements, political parties and socio-economic institutions assists ambitious and proud people to push their individual agendas.

Despite the high level of organisation and communication, and particularly in times of recession and unemployment, people pour out in the streets, loudly testifying of their needs or, of perceived or real unfairness by all others. Such popular involvement is sometimes seen as weakness and as unwanted disturbance of peace and quiet. But more often these are experienced as understandable and important testimonies of a vibrant and mature people that want to be involved and taken seriously in the debate on a nation's path to sustained prosperity and happiness for all.

## "So the socio-economic problems faced by Oman are rather close to those experienced by many European nations. It stands to reason that the applicable solutions may have similar elements as well"

### Share the benefits

Oman's population of 2 million enjoys free education, free healthcare and no taxes. The average per capita income is 25,653 US\$ (2010). Women

can have careers in any sector of the economy. Oman's ancient majlis or consultation system withstood the test of time; communities throughout Oman join hands to secure well-functioning Falaj bringing water from the mountains to lower agricultural lands through underground channels created thousands of years ago. Falaj or 'afaj' is the Arab word for 'distribution'. And distribution means 'share'. Culturally and historically, that is what the Omani nation is about: to share the benefits that the country brings. If any leader in the Arab world has understood this phenomenon and practiced it, it is Sultan Qaboos. That was the basis of his revolt in 1970 against his own father. Until now it has been the leitmotif for his policies and it explains the drive behind the systematic and effective economic development of Oman.

Have higher and lower authorities in Oman lived up to the spirit of this impressive renaissance? Yes and no. Visiting Oman means taking a bath in friendliness, openness, great organisation and an even greater infrastructure in virtually every respect. So yes. Staying in Oman reveals frustration among many middle class families over lack of perspectives and concern over forms of abuse of office. So no. In other words, paternalism – as in the European Union – has at some points taken the form of stifling bureaucracies and even abuse.

An entire European Commission some years ago had to step down as a result of mismanagement and yes, corruption. Despite Europe's dense socio-political networks many Europeans feel estranged from their leadership. The directness and merciless transparency of the Internet have both promoted involvement with and rejection of behavioural patterns of Ministers and senior civil servants. So there is a common thread between Europe and in Oman. Actually much more so than between, for instance, Oman at the one hand and at the

other Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. So the socio-economic problems faced by Oman are rather close to those experienced by many European nations. It stands to reason that the applicable solutions may have similar elements as well.

*Rico Praaning Prawita Adningrat on behalf of the WAM project team.*