



SMEs key to support non-hydrocarbon growth: Seetharaman

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Doha Bank Group CEO Dr R Seetharaman has said the government is committed to the growth of Qatar's non-hydrocarbon sector with small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (SMEs) playing a significant role.

"Qatar is very committed to the vision of having non-oil and gas by 50% in terms of GDP breakup in the next 10 years," he told Gulf Times at the sidelines of a special panel discussion on SMEs hosted by Doha Bank.

Entitled "Empowering SMEs," the forum gathered industry experts such as Enterprise Qatar CEO Omran Hamad al-Kuwari; Qatar Development Bank executive director of strategy

and development Hamad Khamis al-Kubaisi; Qatar Exchange CEO Rashid al-Mansouri; Qatar Business Incubation Centre CEO Aysha al-Mudahka, and UK Trade and Investment's Gareth O'Brien.

Seetharaman said "there is a huge opportunity" for Qatar to diversify away from the oil and gas industry with the "right kind" of support from the banking and finance sectors as well as business incubation agencies.

"So, by 2020, we can achieve that by conceptually reorganising the SME sector with the right kind of entrepreneur support...It means diversification as a structured solution will fly forward," Seetharaman noted.

He added: "If that is the case, you will have more and more competitiveness to come; the global community will come. They have the incentives

and they can have a commercial model that can be competitive enough in global terms."

Seetharaman described Qatar's SME sector as a driving force with a 15% contribution to the country's GDP and stressed that "there is an opportunity to take it further."

He explained that with development strategies and long-term goals the Qatar National Vision 2030 has set in place, it is "measurable and manageable" to achieve by five to seven years not less than 25% to 30% GDP through SMEs.

In terms of workforce, Seetharaman said 50% of the workforce can be absorbed by SMEs - something, which he suggested that Qatar should do, to sustain economic momentum and to sustain employment opportunities.

To transform the SME sector into the backbone of the economy, Seetharaman said government should create social entrepreneurship. "More and more Qataris should come; organisations should be committed to developing this concept and executing it," he said.

In his presentation, O'Brien described SMEs as "incredibly important" to the UK economy for employing 60% of the private sector.

When asked if Qatar is capable of replicating the success of the UK's SME industry, Seetharaman said the country is "competitive enough" with the presence of business incubation agencies and institutions providing entrepreneurs with partial guarantee for unsecured loans, unsecured business models, and seed capital.



Seetharaman (3rd from right) together with industry experts from the finance and business sectors. PICTURE: Jayan Orma