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Draft Policy Recommendations Prepared by the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group, in its 14th Meeting, for the Exchange of Views Session of the 35th COMCEC Session on “Promoting Sustainable Food Systems in the OIC Member States”

The 34th COMCEC Session agreed on “Promoting Sustainable Food Systems in the OIC Member States” as the theme for the Exchange of Views Session at the 35th Session of the COMCEC and requested the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group (AWG) to come up with concrete policy recommendations on this topic and report it to the 35th COMCEC Ministerial Session. The AWG, in its 14th Meeting held on 9-10 October 2019 in Ankara, considered the current level of development of OIC food systems and the challenges as well as possible policy options related to various aspects of sustainable food systems. After intensive deliberations, the AWG has come up with a set of challenges and the policy options for strengthening food systems in the member countries.

CHALLENGES

Agriculture Working Group highlighted the following possible challenges and problems in increasing the resilience of the food systems in the Member Countries:

- Low level of agricultural and labor productivity
- Expensive input costs for plant and animal production
- Small and fragmented land structure
- Decrease in arable lands
- Inefficient use of agricultural machinery and technologies
- Weak market performance and challenges in access to market
- Lack of reliable and up-to-date data on food security
- Inadequate agricultural planning and strategy development
- Political instabilities (i.e. forced movement of farming population, insufficient institutionalization, etc.) in some parts of the OIC geography
- Poor infrastructure and related services
- Limited agro-industry investment
- Poor legal and regulatory framework
- Low priority accorded to the agricultural sector, particularly in the young population, in most of the Member States
- Rapid and uncontrolled urbanization
- High subsidies and protective measures in the agricultural sectors of developed countries
- Price fluctuations of food products
- Limited/low level of intra trade for food products in the OIC region due to high tariff and non-tariff barriers, non-compliance of food products to required food safety and quality standards
- Adverse effects of climate change on agriculture and food systems (drought, water scarcity)
- Poor risk management of natural disasters
- Increasing risk of food adulteration and limited food defense systems in the OIC geography
- Insufficient international branding in food industry and agriculture in general

- Insufficient veterinary services for animal husbandry and fisheries
- Insufficient financing instruments in agriculture
- Difficulties arising from different practices of land tenure system (i.e. women lack land ownership, etc.) in some parts of the OIC region
- Insufficient extension services
- Lack of adequate institutional and human capacity
- Lack of women empowerment in agriculture sector in some parts of the OIC region

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above-mentioned challenges and problems, AWG came up with a set of policy recommendations:

1. Legal and regulatory framework

- Developing national strategies/plans based on robust and country-level data for ensuring food system stability
- Harmonizing standards on agricultural products for enhancing agricultural trade
- Strengthen regulatory activities to ensure food can be certified in accordance with global standards – spanning safety and religious certifications such as Halal – which is essential to enabling exports
- Creating legal and regulatory frameworks that provide an enabling environment for the FDIs and encourage the private sector to invest in more sustainable agri-business operations.
- Developing legal infrastructure that promotes and allows member countries to use non-conventional financing modalities especially Islamic finance.

2. Improving Agro-production and Agricultural Productivity

- Developing policies/programs/mechanisms to improve farmers' timely access to quality inputs (e.g. seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, animal feed and other key ingredients) with a view to increasing quality, quantity and marketability of end products,
- Improving and ensuring the safety and quality of food at all stages of the food chain with constant monitoring
- Developing the storage infrastructure / equipment of regional reserves for food products so as to meet the shortage of strategic and staple products and create regional production industries of selected fertilizers and seeds (seeds banks) in collaboration with the national and regional financial institutions of the OIC Countries as well as with international financial institutions
- Launching programmes for reducing pre-harvest, processing and post-harvest losses and food waste in the member countries through campaigns, technological applications, cultural and social approach,etc.
- Enhancing cooperation and coordination in the whole food chain to reduce food losses and waste
- Encouraging youth participation and women empowerment in agriculture sector
- Encouraging innovation and Research and Development in agriculture and improving access to efficient extension services in agricultural activity and food production.

- Introduction / Employment of best practices in agricultural activity and food production.

3. Development of Infrastructure

- Investing in infrastructures capable to ensure a better conservation and better storage so as to avoid post-harvest losses. Improving logistics infrastructure to facilitate transport and the distribution of food products among the Exporting and Importing Member States.
- Developing infrastructure in rural areas with a view to increasing access to food supply in rural areas and farmers' motivation to survive with their families in local areas.
- Encouraging the development of both physical infrastructure (i.e. irrigation, renewable energy, ICT, etc.) and social infrastructure (schools, hospitals, etc) at the local level to support agro-production and processing.

4. Financing and Investment

- Increasing access of producers to sufficient finance and diversifying credit opportunities
- Encouraging FDI flows in the OIC Region for increasing investments in Agriculture and facilitating technology transfer.
- Formation of a farmer cooperatives and producers' unions to accumulate capital for financing new investments
- Encourage the organization of investment promotion forums/conferences on sub-sectors of agriculture which bring together relevant stakeholders to mobilize the resources among OIC Member Countries.

5. Market Performance and Market Access

- Establishing/improving a Farmer Registry System for farmers/farmer organizations to provide customized supports and assistance as well as extension and market information for farmers,
- Providing need based capacity development support and training to farmers and farmer associations for increasing their access to warehousing and storage capacity,
- Establishing/improving the ingredient and input traceability as well as marketing oriented product standardization and certification to enhance safety and marketability of agricultural products in both domestic and international markets
- Designing Market Information Systems (MIS) through assessing and reviewing targeted stakeholders with a sustained budget support and an effective monitoring and evaluation framework,
- Building sufficient capacity for stock monitoring, trend analysis and forecasting as well as other relevant subjects beyond providing price information for a better functioning MIS,
- Linking MIS to other market-supporting institutions and/or other risk-management tools to increase the mutual benefits,
- Encouraging the development of retail markets to ensure physical access of consumers to the products

- Promoting agricultural cooperatives, unions and associations among small farmers for enhancing input quality, marketing performance and market access.
- Developing and promoting online platforms and e-trade applications in the Member countries to improve market access of producers and to enhance competitive power.

6. Promotion of intra-OIC agricultural trade/ Reducing barriers to trade

- Promoting intra-OIC agricultural trade through tariff reductions, Non-tariff measures (NTMs) and bilateral arrangements/partnerships among the Member Countries across different product segments of food and agriculture
- Strengthening and implementing multilateral trade arrangements (e.g. TPS-OIC - Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC)) with a view to strengthening the OIC-wide food systems and reducing the risk of food crises particularly for the vulnerable member countries, taken into consideration the existing smaller/regional preferential trade arrangements.

7. Human and institutional capacity

- Improving the institutional and human capacity of farmers, farmer organizations, relevant government agencies and other possible stakeholders through introducing innovative management and organizational systems.
- Developing strategies for the long-term skill development in agriculture sector through proper education systems and training centers.
- Enhancing the capacity of the Member Countries in collection, management and dissemination of food security data with a view to designing sound and evidence-based food security policies.
- Strengthening IOFS to conduct research and development activities in food sector across the OIC and raise awareness of opportunities and challenges in the OIC regarding food security

8. Monitoring and evaluation of food security

- Encouraging Member Countries to take steps towards establishing an integrated comprehensive online database for agricultural statistics.
- Fostering better understanding of the specific gaps and the required actions in a given country's food system through encouraging member countries that have been most at risk to conduct in-depth studies at the country/regional level.
- Supplementing internationally agreed food security indices with detailed monitoring and rating of the Member Countries
- Developing consistent and comparable KPIs for monitoring food system stability to develop early warning systems at the OIC level

9. Adaptation and mitigation strategies for reducing the adverse effects of climate change, man-made disasters, etc.

- Developing emergency assistance mechanisms at the national level to mitigate the adverse effects of food crises and natural disasters and strengthen intra-OIC cooperation to that end.

- Utilizing early warning systems (i.e UNFAO’s Early Warning- Early Action (EWEA) System) particularly in the member countries being vulnerable to natural disasters and food insecurity.
- Enhancing disaster risk reduction and management capacities of the member states for better adaptation and mitigation of agriculture sector to climate change particularly through:
 - Adopting modern irrigation technologies to improve the efficiency of irrigation systems.
 - Introducing suitable plant /crop varieties to cope with water scarcity and soil degradation

10. International and Regional Cooperation

- Promoting experience sharing and technology transfer among the OIC Member Countries in the areas related to in sustainable food systems and food security.
- Developing pilot national and sub-regional food security programs and projects for increasing the efficiency of the agricultural production in partnership with the OIC and other international institutions specialized in agriculture sector.
- Developing food security funds (e.g. Sovereign Wealth Funds, Zakat Funds etc.) with the support of the governments, the relevant OIC institutions (i.e. IDB), other multilateral organizations (e.g. World Bank, UNFAO) and private investors.
- Encouraging the IOFS to develop viable projects towards addressing the needs of the member Countries and the implementation of the policy recommendations of the COMCEC.
- Enhancing private sector cooperation in all areas of sustainable food systems and ensuring the engagement of the all relevant stakeholders including the private sector in finding solutions to a more sustainable and nutritious food system.