



REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

PROGRESS REPORT

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

1. Introduction:

COMCEC (The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) has been continuing its efforts towards enhancing economic and commercial cooperation among the 57 OIC Member Countries since 1984. The main objective of the COMCEC is to address the economic challenges of the Islamic Ummah and to contribute to their development efforts. In this regard, COMCEC serves as a policy dialogue forum for producing and disseminating knowledge, sharing experience, and best practices, developing a common understanding and approximating policies among the Member Countries. The COMCEC continues its cooperation endeavors in light of the COMCEC Strategy, which has become operational in 2013.

The COMCEC Strategy brought a new momentum in the efforts for enhancing economic and commercial cooperation among the OIC Member States. The Strategy does not only put forward a clear vision for the Islamic Ummah but also define implementation instruments for reaching its objectives. The Member States showed great interest and support to the implementation instruments of the Strategy namely the COMCEC Working Groups and the COMCEC Project Funding during the past eight years of the Strategy's implementation.

The COMCEC Working Groups provide a regular platform for sharing knowledge and experience among the OIC Member Countries. Research reports are conducted for Working Group Meetings to reveal the state of affairs in the member countries related to the specific themes of the Meetings. Some of the member countries are studied in detail in these reports through field visits, surveys, and interviews.

COMCEC Working Groups are held in the six cooperation areas defined by the COMCEC Strategy, namely trade, transport and communications, tourism, agriculture, finance, and poverty alleviation. Since the 36th Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings were held. All the documents regarding the working group meetings are available on the COMCEC website in e-book format (<http://ebook.comcec.org/>).

The COMCEC Project Funding, the second implementation instrument of the COMCEC Strategy, provides an opportunity for the Member Countries as well as the OIC institutions to implement multilateral projects in line with the goals and targets set by the COMCEC Strategy. Moreover, the policy recommendations, which are produced by the Working Groups and adopted by the Ministerial Sessions, are transformed into concrete projects. These projects serve to the ultimate aim of improving institutional and human capacity within the OIC Member Countries.

The Member States and OIC Institutions have shown great interest to the COMCEC Project Funding. Under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. However, implementation of these projects postponed to 2021 due to international travel restrictions arising from the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, under the 8th Call for Project Proposals made in September 2020, 5 new projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2021. All the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021.

Furthermore, the CCO has initiated a new capacity building program called COMCEC COVID Response (CCR). The Program aims at assisting member countries with a view to address existing and potential future ramifications of the pandemic. In this regard, the CCO has introduced new modalities under CCR to directly respond member country needs related to the pandemic. The First Call under this Program was started in October 2020 and finalized in March 2021. In this regard, 9 projects of the Member Countries have been selected to be financed within the framework of the CCR.

Furthermore, considering the current situation and special conditions in Palestine, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds, the CCO has initiated the Al-Quds Program with an aim of emphasizing the importance of Al-Quds as well as its Palestinian-Arab identity in a systematic way. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine, the program composes of several interrelated projects, which focus on the needs of tourism sector and destination management in the city. Two projects were already completed in 2020. In 2021 implementation period, 6 projects will be executed covering the areas of tourism promotion, cultural heritage, community resilience, online reservation and food tourism.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 36th Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

2. Resolutions of the 36th Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy

The 36th Session of the COMCEC was held on 25-26 November 2020 in virtual-only format. The Session was informed by the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) on the progress achieved towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. After fruitful deliberations, the 36th Session of the COMCEC adopted the following resolutions, among others, for ensuring the effective implementation of the COMCEC Strategy:

- The Session welcomed the Progress Report submitted by the CCO highlighting the progress achieved in the implementation of the Strategy; commended the Member Countries and the OIC Institutions for their valuable contributions to its implementation and requested the Member States and the OIC Institutions to further their full support to the implementation of the Strategy.
- The Session requested the CCO to regularly report the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy to the COMCEC Sessions, the Follow-up Committee Meetings, and other relevant OIC fora.
- The Session welcomed the successful convening of the COMCEC Working Groups in the cooperation areas in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the 35th Session of the COMCEC and also welcomed the research studies and sectoral outlooks conducted and prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office specifically for enriching the discussions in each COMCEC Working Group Meeting.
- The Session commended the efforts of the Working Groups towards approximating policies among the Member States in their fields of competence and welcomed the policy recommendations made by the Working Groups in their meetings held in July-September 2020 period.
- The Session called upon the relevant Member States to utilize COMCEC Policy Follow-up System, which has been established by the COMCEC Coordination Office for the

effective follow-up of the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations.

- Commending the efforts of the Member States and the OIC Institutions for the realization of COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations, the Session invited all the Member States to exert every effort, to the extent possible, to implement the Policy Recommendations and requested the OIC Institutions to support the Member States to this end through capacity development and training programmes for implementation of policy recommendations.
- The Session also commended the OIC Institutions' efforts in helping the member countries in their efforts towards mitigating the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, among others, "the COMCEC COVID-19 Response Program" launched by the CCO; publication titled "Socio-Economic Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic in OIC Member Countries," and various training and capacity building programs conducted by SESRIC; "Strategic Preparedness and Response Program for the COVID-19 Pandemic" initiated by the IsDB Group; the webinars on the impact of Covid-19 on intra-OIC trade and investment flows organized by the ICDT in collaboration with OIC and International Institutions; various trade finance and trade activities (financing support for the purchase of medical supplies, food staples and SMEs, webinars, support for equipment and capacity development, harmonization of standards, etc.) undertaken by ITFC to assist Member Countries' fight against COVID-19 pandemic and information sharing activities of the ICCIA to counter the COVID-19 crisis at both the Governmental as well as the Private Sector levels.
- Expressed its appreciation to the SESRIC for the activities, particularly capacity building and training programmes, contributing to the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations in the six cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy.
- Taking note of the valuable outcomes of projects previously financed by COMCEC since 2014, the Session invited Member Countries to intensify their efforts to harness the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding particularly with a view to materialize the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- The Session welcomed the finalization of twenty-two projects funded under the COMCEC Project Funding in 2019 and twenty two projects to be implemented under the seventh project call and also welcomed the eighth project call made by the COMCEC Coordination Office in September 2020.
- The Session called on the COMCEC National and Working Group Focal points to work more closely with the COMCEC Coordination Office for effective coordination and communication.
- The Session invited the Member States to ensure the participation of the COMCEC National Focal Points and COMCEC Working Group Focal Points, to the COMCEC Follow-up Committee Meetings and the COMCEC Sessions.
- The Session encouraged the Member States, which have registered to the COMCEC Working Groups to actively participate in the upcoming Meetings of the relevant Working Groups.

- Noting with appreciation that the number of Member States having registered to at least one COMCEC Working Group has reached 50 the Session requested the Member States, which have not done so yet, to register to the COMCEC Working Groups and actively participate in the upcoming Meetings of the Working Groups.
- The Session took note with appreciation that the member countries namely Indonesia, the Gambia, Nigeria and Turkey have already set up national coordination mechanisms for facilitating the coordination of COMCEC related work particularly the implementation of the COMCEC Resolutions and Ministerial Policy Recommendations at the national level and encouraged the other Member States to set up similar coordination mechanisms for these purposes.
- The Session called upon the working group focal points to be actively involved in the knowledge production efforts of the COMCEC through, among others, assisting in collection and verification of country specific data and providing feedbacks to research studies.
- The Session expressed its appreciation to the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group, ICD, ICIEC, ICCIA, and SMIIC for their efforts towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.
- The Session reiterated the relevant resolutions of the 34th and 35th COMCEC Session, which emphasize the role of COMCEC in ensuring the overall coordination of the activities of the OIC relating to economic and commercial cooperation among the Member States, in accordance with its mandate and also emphasized the role of COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) in undertaking activities with the Member States, the OIC Institutions and other international organizations in order to realize the objectives of the COMCEC as outlined in its Statute.
- The Session also reiterated its request to the OIC Institutions working in the economic and commercial fields to continue coordination with the COMCEC Coordination Office, including through the Sessional Committee, in order to ensure progress and complementarity in the implementation both of the COMCEC Strategy and the OIC 2025: Program of Action, especially in the areas of trade and investment.
- The Session adopted the recommendations of the 36th Meeting of the Follow-up Committee of the COMCEC held in virtual-only format on 20-21 October 2020.
- The Session requested the concerned Member States to actively participate in the activities to be organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group (ITFC), ICCIA, and SMIIC in the cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy and called upon these institutions to send invitations to the Member States sufficiently in advance of the meetings so as to ensure their participation.

3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy

3.1. Meetings of the COMCEC Working Groups

Taking into consideration the requests and valuable feedbacks from National Focal Points and relevant senior-experts of the Member Countries, there have been slight modifications in the preparation process of COMCEC Sectoral Research Reports and the conduct of Working Group Meetings since the last COMCEC Ministerial Meeting.

In this new modality, one research report will be prepared for two consecutive Working Group meetings. While the first draft of the report will be submitted to the first meeting, the completed report will be submitted to the second meeting.

With this methodology, as there will be a longer preparation period and sufficient time for perfection of the final study, the active contributions of member country focal points and representatives in the process are more crucial.

Since the 36th Session of the COMCEC, the 16th round of COMCEC Working Group Meetings was held in May 2021 (15th meeting for the Financial Cooperation Working Group). Apart from the relevant public institutions, representatives from the private sector and NGOs as well as relevant international organizations participated in the working group meetings for enabling the reflection of a wide range of stakeholders' perspectives during the discussions.

All the documents and presentations made during the WG Meetings are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.1. COMCEC Trade Working Group

International trade is an important catalyst for economic and social development. The evidence shows that enhancing international trade in countries contributes to the elevation of living standards, investments and employment. Many countries perceive international trade as an important tool for strengthening their integration with other countries and have taken important steps towards increasing trade and improving trading environment through multilateral, regional, or bilateral initiatives.

However, international trade has been one of the core economic areas affected by COVID-19 pandemic due to the strict measures on mobility which were taken to control the spread of the disease. Maintaining international supply chain of goods has a crucial role in the successful management of pandemic since it is essential to sustain and save lives and livelihoods. Therefore the policies for combating the pandemic need to be balanced with innovative and effective counter-policies in order to sustain trade facilitation and to prevent the strict measures turning into protective trade policies which may in turn deepen the overall crisis. Therefore, endeavors to sustain trade facilitation gains more importance especially during and after pandemic periods.

Within this framework, the COMCEC Trade Working Group (TWG) has devoted its 16th meeting to “Counter-Measures to Sustain Trade Facilitation During and After Covid-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member Countries”.

During its 16th Meeting, TWG elaborated on this topic with a special emphasis on the OIC Member Countries. During the Meeting, the preliminary findings of the research report as well as the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries and international organizations with regard to counter-measures taken to sustain trade facilitation during pandemic were elaborated. All the documents prepared for the Working Group Meetings are available on the COMCEC website (www.comcec.org).

A research report with the same theme is being prepared for the meetings of the COMCEC TWG this year. While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 16th TCWG meeting, the final version of the report will be submitted to the 17th TCWG meeting, to be held in the September 2021. The main objective of the study is to elaborate on best practices, novel techniques and innovative approaches from the OIC countries and beyond in trade facilitation

both for curbing the negative impacts of the pandemic and foreseeing possible trade related opportunities for the post pandemic era.

3.1.2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

The COVID-19 outbreak is affecting all modes of transport. Many transport services are either shutting down or scaling-back as routes are no longer viable. Considering the importance of developing sound mitigation strategies for the transport service providers during and after COVID-19 and to contribute to the debate from the Islamic countries' point of view, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) has devoted its 16th meeting to “Mitigation Strategies for Transport Service Providers during and after COVID-19”. The 16th Meeting of COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group was held virtually with the above-mentioned theme on May 31st, 2021.

A research report with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TCWG meetings (16th and 17th). While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 16th TCWG meeting, the final version of the report will be submitted to the 17th TCWG meeting, to be held on the October 2021. The main objective of the study is to establish a conceptual foundation for better understanding of the current and future implications of the COVID-19 on transport service providers in the OIC Member Countries and come up with sound mitigation strategies and policies to tackle the challenges arisen so far.

The First Draft of the Report reveals important findings in terms of mitigation strategies for transport service providers in the world as well as in the member countries. In this respect, the First Draft Report provides a conceptual framework on the impact of the COVID-19 on the transport sector in the world as well as in the OIC region, and the global trends and successful implementations for the containment of the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the transport service providers. The final version of the report is expected to highlight the major challenges faced by the OIC member countries with mitigation strategies against COVID-19 and include sound, specific, and practical policy recommendations for developing/improving mitigation strategies for transport service providers during and after COVID-19 in the OIC member countries.

All the documents and presentations made during the WG Meeting are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.3. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Tourism sector, by its very nature, has been affected most severely by the pandemic. In fact, it is considered one of the hardest hit sectors by the Covid 19 outbreak. According to the latest data from UNWTO, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) declined by 74% in 2020 over the previous year due to widespread travel restrictions and the massive decrease in tourism demand.

Within this framework, the OIC region experienced a sharp decline (71%) in the number of arrivals in 2020 due to the Pandemic. OIC-MENA experienced 61% decrease in arrivals, whereas tourist arrivals to OIC-Asia and OIC Sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 75%. Concerning tourism receipts, while OIC experiences a 65% decrease in receipts with OIC-ASIA and OIC-MENA experiences 74% and 72% losses respectively. Whereas, OIC-Subsaharan Africa experiences a 57% decline in tourism receipts in 2020.

Given the importance of the issue, The 16th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) was held on May 25th, 2021 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Mitigation Strategies for Tourism after Covid-19”.

A research report with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TWG meetings (16th and 17th). While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 16th TWG meeting, the final version of the report will be submitted to the 17th TWG meeting, to be held in September 2021. The main objective of the study is to establish a conceptual foundation for better understanding of the current and future implications of the COVID-19 on tourism in the OIC Member Countries and come up with sound mitigation strategies and policies to tackle the challenges arisen so far. The expected outcome of this study will be a comprehensive, but concise overview of implications of the COVID-19 on tourism in the OIC Member Countries, highlighting crucial issues and challenges, which OIC countries face during and after COVID-19, and major recommendations outlining how these issues can be addressed by the various players.

The First Draft Report reveals important findings in terms of mitigation strategies for tourism sector in the world as well as in the member countries. The First Draft Report provides a conceptual framework on the impact of the COVID-19 on the tourism sector in the world as well as in the OIC region, and the global trends and successful implementations for the containment of the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism. In light of the discussion during the meeting and with the active contribution of the member countries, the draft report will be improved. The final version of the report is expected to highlight the major challenges faced by the OIC member countries with mitigation strategies against COVID-19 and include sound, specific, and practical policy recommendations for developing/improving mitigation strategies for tourism during and after COVID-19 in the OIC member countries.

The reports and presentations submitted to the Working Group are available on the COMCEC web page. (<http://www.comcec.org/>)

3.1.4. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group

The global lockdown due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 has deeply affected the agriculture and food systems, like other economic sectors, in almost all countries. The pandemic quickly put serious strains on the food supply chains involving farmers, agricultural inputs, processing plants, shipping, retailers, and more.

Given the importance of the subject, the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group devoted its 16th and 17th Meetings on the sustainability of food supply chains. The 16th Meeting of the Agriculture Working Group was held virtually on May 27th, 2021 with the theme “How to Ensure the Sustainability of Food Supply Chains in Turbulent Times: The Case of COVID-19”.

A research report on the aforementioned theme is being prepared and the preliminary findings of the report were presented during the 16th Meeting of the Working Group. The presentation indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted food supply and food sustainability mostly due to the policies and actions taken by governments mainly to control and minimize the effects and spread of the outbreak. This leads to food price fluctuations, food insecurity, and malnutrition. Despite the OIC member countries have exhibited significant improvement in agricultural development and food security over the last years, the degree and the speed of the development are uneven between and within countries. Particularly low-income member countries suffer from poor infrastructure, inadequate capacity, and inefficient use of agricultural

resources. It was mentioned that there are two main channels through which food insecurity interacts with Covid-19. First, a decrease in food production and supply and the associated increase in food inflation bring about disruptions in food production and supply chains. Second, a decrease in demand and reduced calorie intake, and compromised nutrition trigger income reductions.

The final version of the report will be submitted to the 17th Meeting of the Working Group which will be held on September 16th, 2021.

All the documents and presentations made during the 16th Working Group Meeting are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.5. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

The COVID-19 outbreak has compelled the governments to take strict measures such as closing borders, curfews, travel restrictions and quarantine measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic. While these measures have been effective in preventing the spread of the pandemic, they have also brought socio-economic challenges in many low and middle-income countries, including OIC member countries where poverty and unregistered employment are intense and social protection systems are weak. Though the impacts of the pandemic vary from country to country, it will most likely increase poverty and socio-economic inequalities at a global scale.

Given the importance of the subject 16th Meeting of the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group was held on May 24th, 2021, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “COVID-19 and Its Adverse Effects on Socio-Economic Inequalities in the OIC Member Countries.” A specific research report is being prepared on this crucial topic. The first draft of the said report was submitted to the 16th Meeting of the Working Group. The draft report reviews the global trends in COVID-19 and main challenges for the member countries, highlights the main data gaps and related statistical issues, evaluates the existing policies, and finally comes up with some important recommendations.

In the report it is highlighted that the nature of shocks hitting the developing countries during the pandemic has some specific features that lead to accumulation of socio-economic risks along various dimensions. Those risks are also highly relevant for most OIC countries. Projected and estimated income/output losses are substantial for economies that extensively draw on exports of commodities, tourism revenues, remittances, and also for the ones with limited fiscal capacities. Moreover, the expected recovery after the sharp initial losses is projected to leave permanent damages on the socio-economic status of disadvantaged groups—such as low-skilled workers, women, and youth. These asymmetric effects have been harmful especially for poverty, gender equality, education, social protection, refugees/IDPs, slum dwellers, labor market outcomes, remittances, international trade, commodity prices, food insecurity, and tourism dimensions in the OIC economies.

All the documents and presentations made during the WG Meetings are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.6. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group

Islamic finance is an interest free system that is responsible, ethical, sustainable and shock-preserving. Hence, positioning it well to be part of the COVID-19 response. Islamic financial

institutions offer a range of financing instruments that can positively impact every group from SMEs in least developed countries to policy makers in highly developed countries.

Given the importance of the subject, the 15th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) was held on April 6th, 2021, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “*The Role of Islamic Finance in Supporting MSMEs against the COVID-19*”.

In accordance with the new modality adopted for the research reports, a research report with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC FCWG meetings (15th and 16th). While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 15th FCWG meeting. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 16th FCWG meeting to be held on September 9th, 2021.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of Islamic finance in supporting the MSMEs throughout and after the COVID-19 pandemic in various aspects such as Islamic banking, Islamic capital markets, takaful, and Islamic social finance institutions.

In the aforementioned meeting, the first draft of the research report including the general overview, methodology, scope and objectives of it along with first-case country was presented. Also, Indonesia as the first-case country of the study was presented in-detail.

The research team elaborated on the recent initiatives taken by governments, international bodies, national Islamic financial institutions towards MSMEs, and constraints and challenges in different jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the analytical report is expected to suggest concrete policy recommendations to OIC Member Countries to promote the role of Islamic finance in supporting the MSMEs during the COVID-19 and accelerate the development of Islamic finance.

Moreover, in order to enrich the data and analysis in the research report and to get insights about the policy environment on the role of Islamic Finance in Supporting SMEs against the COVID-19, field visits (Jordan, Kuwait, Indonesia, Russia) are being conducted.

All the documents and presentations made during the WG Meetings are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.2. The COMCEC Project Funding

The COMCEC Project Funding is one of the two implementation instruments of the COMCEC Strategy, which aims at providing funding to the COMCEC Projects in the form of grants. The Strategy introduces a well-defined project cycle management with a clearly identified financial mechanism. The COMCEC Funded Projects to be submitted by the Member States and the OIC institutions under the COMCEC Project Funding serve to the realization of the objectives of the Strategy and of the policy recommendations adopted by COMCEC Sessions as well as to the mobilization of human and institutional resources of the Member States.

This instrument enables the Member Countries and OIC Institutions to get involved in cooperation efforts to overcome the common challenges of the Member States in cooperation areas. It provides an opportunity to the Member Countries to propose multilateral projects in priority areas identified by the COMCEC Strategy, the working groups and the policy recommendations.

COMCEC Project Funding is a valuable tool to assist member countries in their policy making

endeavors. It turns COMCEC policy recommendations into practice while improving the institutional and human capacity of the Member Countries. Each funded project is implemented in cooperation with the participation of at least three OIC Member Countries. In doing so, it not only enables sharing knowledge and experience in a specific theme, but also improves the ability of the Member Countries to work together in addressing the common problems through the implementation of multilateral projects.

Under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. However, implementation of these projects postponed to 2021 due to international travel restrictions arising from the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, under the 8th Call for Project Proposals made in September 2020, 5 new projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2021. All the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021.

Table 1: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding under in 2021 Implementation Year.

| No | Project Owner | Project Partners | Cooperation Area | Project Title |
|----|-------------------|---|---------------------|--|
| 1 | Benin | Niger, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire | Agriculture | Enhancing Capacity for Warehousing and Storage of Cereals and Cowpeas |
| 2 | Niger | Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria | Agriculture | Capacity Building on Cereals and Cowpeas Storage (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 3 | Suriname | Indonesia and Turkey | Agriculture | Capacity Building on Irrigation Systems in Vegetable Crops (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 4 | COMSTECH | Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey | Agriculture | New Breeding Technologies for Food and Nutritional Security (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 5 | SESRIC | Bangladesh, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Suriname, Turkey and Uganda | Agriculture | Enhancing Food Security through National Food Balance Sheets (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 6 | Iran | Turkey, Oman and Malaysia | Agriculture | Contract Farming for Linking Small Farmers to Markets within OIC Member Countries |
| 7 | Brunei Darussalam | Indonesia and Malaysia | Finance | Capacity Building Program on Sukuk, ESG Sukuk and Islamic Fintech (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 8 | Malaysia | Turkey, Brunei Darussalam | Finance | Advancing Islamic Capital Market through Financial Technology (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 9 | Nigeria | Sudan, Mozambique | Finance | Improving Takaful in the OIC Member States |
| 10 | Sierra Leone | Malaysia and Nigeria | Finance | Facilitating Women Entrepreneurs' Access to Islamic Finance (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 11 | Afghanistan | Turkey and Malaysia | Finance | Development of Takaful Market |
| 12 | Benin | The Gambia, Niger and Turkey | Poverty Alleviation | TVET Piloting in the Selected OIC Countries (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 13 | The Gambia | Sierra Leone and Nigeria | Poverty Alleviation | Infusing Entrepreneurship Education in School Curricula (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 14 | Turkey | Sudan, Somalia, Niger | Poverty Alleviation | Strengthening Health Human Capacity and Creating Intervention Task Force (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 15 | Maldives | Turkey, Malaysia | Trade | Improve Food Import-Export Control System (to be implemented in 2021) |

| No | Project Owner | Project Partners | Cooperation Area | Project Title |
|----|---------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| 16 | Sudan | Chad, Egypt, Tunisia | Trade | Efficient Border Management through One Stop Border Post |
| 17 | ICCIA | 25 Member Countries | Trade | Digital Transformation for Enhancing Trade Facilitation (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 18 | SMIIC | Turkey, Morocco, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Djibouti, Senegal | Trade | OIC/SMIIC Halal Foundation Training for Africa Region (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 19 | Turkey | Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan and Nigeria | Trade | Developing Human Capital in OIC Countries for Technical Halal Audition Based on SMIIC Halal Certification System |
| 20 | Cameroon | Côte d'Ivoire and Chad | Transport and Communications | Establishing Maritime Transport Archives (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 21 | Nigeria | Benin, Togo and the Gambia | Transport and Communications | Monitoring Lagos-Abidjan Transport Corridor |
| 22 | Turkey | Algeria and Tunisia | Transport and Communications | Implementation of International Maritime Conventions (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 23 | Maldives | Gambia and Turkey | Transport and Communications | Enhancing ICT Skills: Empowering The Youth |
| 24 | Cameroon | Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal | Tourism | Capacity Building of Destination Management Organizations Stakeholders (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 25 | Turkey | Afghanistan and Iran | Tourism | Revitalizing Mevlana's Travel Route (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 26 | Uganda | The Gambia, Malaysia, Mozambique, and Nigeria | Tourism | Community-Based Tourism through the Promotion of Heritage Sites (to be implemented in 2021) |
| 27 | Burkina Faso | Mali, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia | Tourism | Capacity Building on Crisis Impact Assessment Method for Destination Recovery |

Furthermore, an online training program on the implementation process of the projects under the COMCEC Project Funding was held on 6-7 April 2021. Within the scope of the program, project staff were informed about the actors and their responsibilities in the implementation period, monitoring and reporting processes, critical issues in the implementation period and basic working principles of the project management information system.

3.2.1. New Initiatives: COMCEC COVID Response and Al Quds Program

COMCEC COVID Response

With a view to address the existing and potential ramifications of the COVID Pandemic, the CCO has decided to initiate the COMCEC COVID Response (CCR) for the benefit of member country public institutions. The CCR is mainly about alleviating the negative impact of the pandemic on member country economies with a particular focus on agriculture, trade and tourism sectors in the pilot phase. Under the Program, the CCO will finance certain types of projects, which would focus on needs assessment, sharing expertise and providing direct grants to final beneficiaries.

Through the Needs Assessment projects, reports assessing the damage imposed by the Pandemic will be produced for proposing possible solutions and actions on the selected sector and theme. During the preparation of these reports local field visits, interviews, desk based research will be carried out for enriching the content and providing sound solutions to the challenges faced in the specific sectors.

Moreover, Sharing Expertise projects will enable knowledge and experience transfer among the member countries to fight the negative impact of the pandemic on selected sectors. This type of projects can include several types of activities namely, Visiting Expert, Training or Workshop.

Finally, as a new project type called “Direct Grant” enables the Project Owner Member Countries to procure machinery, equipment or services to directly meet the needs of the final beneficiaries, such as institutions, farmers or SMEs.

In this regard, the CCO started the 1st Call for project proposal to be financed under new CCR Program in 2021 in October 2020. After the appraisal process, a total of 9 projects have been selected to be financed, including 4 Needs Assessment, 3 Sharing Expertise and 2 Direct Grant Projects. Table 2 below shows the List of Projects to be financed by the COMCEC Coordination Office under CCR in 2021.

Table 2: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC COVID Response in 2021

| | Project Owner | Cooperation Area | Project Title | Type of the Project |
|---|---------------|------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Indonesia | Agriculture | Facilitating poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups’ access to food in West Java Province, Indonesia | Needs Assessment |
| 2 | Iran | Agriculture | Investigating the Effects of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Related Policies on the Production and Supply Units of Greenhouse Products, Flowers and Ornamental Plants in Iran (PSGFP) | Needs Assessment |
| 3 | Turkey | Agriculture | Acceleration of Transformation of Digitalization in Agriculture Sector for Ensuring Sustainable Food Security | Needs Assessment |
| 4 | Azerbaijan | Tourism | Supporting the accommodation business in implementing hygiene standards | Direct Grant |
| 5 | Bangladesh | Tourism | Rejuvenation of Small Businesses Affected by COVID-19: A Case on Tour Operators in Bangladesh | Needs Assessment |
| 6 | Burkina Faso | Tourism | Developing of Health Protocols for Tourism Industries to Fight Against COVID-19 | Sharing Expertise (Visiting Expert) |
| 7 | Suriname | Tourism | COVID-19 Awareness & Resilience Training for Tourism and Hospitality Businesses | Sharing Expertise (Training) |
| 8 | Lebanon | Trade | Digital Transformation of The Ministry of Economy and Trade Lebanon | Sharing Expertise (Visiting Expert) |
| 9 | Palestine | Trade | Modernizing the Electronic Infrastructure of the Ministry of National Economy | Direct Grant |

Furthermore, two training programs were held with regards to the CCR. The first Online Training Program on CCR was held on October 21st, 2020 on project preparation, submission, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation procedures in CCR Program. The participants were also informed regarding the details of the new project types, namely Direct Grant, Needs Assessment and Sharing Expertise.

Secondly, Project Management Training Program for the CCR Projects was held on 20-21 April 2021 with the participation of the owner institutions and personnel of the projects to be financed under the CCR in 2021. During the Training Program, the participants were informed about the project types under the CCR as well as the responsible actors, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes, visibility issues and other critical issues for successful implementation in each project type under the CCR.

COMCEC Al-Quds Program

Secondly, considering the current situation and special conditions in Palestine, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds, the CCO has initiated the Al-Quds Program with an aim of emphasizing the importance of Al-Quds as well as its Palestinian-Arab identity in a systematic way. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine, the program comprises several interrelated projects, which focus on the needs of tourism sector and destination management in the city. The first two pilot projects were completed in 2020.

The first two projects have been initiated in 2020. Under the first project titled *“Analyzing the Tourism Infrastructure and Developing a Tourism Destination Road Map for Al-Quds”*, the CCO has conducted a research study for analyzing the tourism infrastructure and developing a tourism destination roadmap for Al Quds. Within the framework of this research study, the current situation of the tourism infrastructure in Al-Quds (hotels, restaurants, transportation, human resources, guides, tour operators, etc.) has been assessed, the most urgent areas that need investment have been determined as well as the cultural assets and facilities that could be included in the tourism offering of Al-Quds have been analysed. An assessment of the number and capacity of tourism facilities and workers in Al-Quds, the need for training of sector professionals and craftsmen has been made in the project. The Project has ultimately provided a SWOT analysis and mission, vision and objective for a tourism destination and communication strategy for Al-Quds.

The second project, titled *“Supporting Institutional Capacity of Al-Quds Tourism and Heritage Council”* aimed at improving the institutionalization and sustainable financing mechanism of the Al-Quds Tourism and Heritage Council (ATHC) to be a well-functioning destination management organization for Al-Quds. The project has foreseen a conceptual study for determining ATHC personnel training needs, developing training modules and deliver training programs, recommending a DMO organizational structure, HR needs and sustainable self-funding opportunities. Within this scope, after making the training needs assessment for ATHC staff regarding competencies and qualifications required, an online training program has been organized for the ATHC personnel in i) destination management and competitiveness, ii) tourism and cultural heritage planning and iii) tourism product development strategies.

In 2021 implementation period, 6 projects will be executed covering the areas of among others, exhibitions, art production, trainings, capacity building, procurement of machinery/equipment/service, online platform development, renovations, research, audio-visual material production etc.

Table 3: Al-Quds Program: Projects to be implemented in 2021

| Project Owner | Project Title |
|---|---|
| Ministry of National Economy of Palestine | The Artists' Identity Path: Tracing Heritage in Al-Quds |
| | “Jerusalemites”: Because We Are the Place and Time |
| | Enjoy the Hidden Jewels of Al Quds |
| | Old City Bakeries: Food Tourism and Heritage |
| | Al-Quds: Secrets and Narratives to Unfold |
| | Promoting Palestinian Heritage |

Furthermore, COMCEC Coordination Office held two Online Training Programs regarding COMCEC Al-Quds Program. During the first online training program held on December 24th, 2021 the stakeholders were informed about the application procedures for the projects. During the second training held on May 25th – 26th, the participants were informed about the project activities as well as the responsible actors, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes, visibility issues and other critical issues for successful implementation under the Program. During the second day of the training, the participants were informed about the financial reporting and payment issues.

4. Important Projects and Activities of the OIC Institutions and Forums Serving to the Objectives of the Strategy

The relevant OIC Institutions are also undertaking programs, projects, and activities that serve the objectives of the Strategy. Some of the projects and activities held since the 36th Session of the COMCEC are provided below.

- TPS-OIC is the most important project of the COMCEC in the field of trade. The System will not only facilitate increasing the intra-OIC trade but also build a framework for cooperation among the OIC Member Countries. Thus, it will be a basis for further cooperation among the member countries. In this regard, the 36th of the COMCEC Meeting welcomed the submission of updated concession lists to the TNC Secretariat by Turkey, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Jordan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Morocco. And also at the meeting Saudi Arabia informed the Committee that the Gulf Cooperation Council will communicate its most updated concession lists to the TNC Secretariat at the earliest convenience on behalf of its six member countries namely; Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. Furthermore the 36th of the COMCEC Meeting welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey, as the chair of the 1st and 2nd round of the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC), to convene a TNC Meeting in 2021 as soon as possible for discussing the issues pertaining the implementation of the System and setting a date for its effectuation. In line with this resolution, TPS-OIC Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Meeting was held virtually on June 1st and 2nd with the Participation of eleven member countries (Bahrain,

Bangladesh, Iran, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan, Turkey and United Arab Emirates). The TNC has taken important decisions regarding the Roadmap for the Implementation of TPS-OIC with the valuable contribution of participating states. The Committee agreed upon 1st July 2022 as the cut-off date for the effectuation of the system and requested the concerned member states to expedite the completion of their internal procedures and other preparations until that date.

- The Forums operating in the field of financial cooperation under the COMCEC provide regular cooperation platforms for the relevant authorities of the Member Countries. In this respect, the OIC Member States Stock Exchanges Forum has been working towards enhancing cooperation among the stock exchanges of the OIC Member Countries and relevant institutions. The Forum has also developed some important projects including S&P OIC/COMCEC 50 Shariah Index. Furthermore, the Forum has been working on the establishment of a gold exchange/platform for the OIC Member Countries. The 14th Meeting of the Forum was held on October 8th, in 2020. Details regarding the Forum activities are available on the Forum website. (www.oicexchanges.org)
- The COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum provides a regular cooperation mechanism for capital markets regulatory bodies of the Member States. Along with its regular activities, the Forum has also been exerting efforts to realize the “COMCEC Real Estate Initiative” in light of the relevant resolutions of the COMCEC. The 9th Meeting of the Forum was organized on October 13th-14th, in 2020.
- The OIC-COMCEC Central Banks Forum facilitates sharing experiences among the relevant authorities of the member countries and enhancing institutional and human capacity in this field. The 2nd Meeting of the Forum was organized as a virtual-only format, on October 8th, in 2020.
- Islamic Trade Fairs are organized for increasing intra-OIC trade and promoting the products, industries, and services of the OIC member countries. In addition to the Islamic Trade Fairs, sector-specific fairs and exhibitions are also organized by the Member Countries in cooperation with ICDT.
- Since the 36th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC, SESRIC conducts studies on economic and social developments in the OIC Member States with a view to generating proposals to strengthen cooperation among them. The Centre continues to prepare regular technical background reports and research studies on a wide range of socio-economic issues on the agendas of various OIC conferences and related meetings, particularly the sectoral ministerial conferences and the annual sessions of the relevant standing committees. In doing so, the Centre continues to make a significant contribution to the OIC policy dialogue mechanism by analysing the current situation at the OIC level and suggesting appropriate policy actions to address the challenges and strengthen intra-OIC cooperation in the relevant fields.
- The Centre also continues to play an essential role in strengthening and improving the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) in the OIC Member States with a view to producing better national statistics and thus helping policy-makers introduce better national policies and strategies. In this context, the Centre contributes significantly to the technical capacity building of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and

other constituents of the NSSs of the OIC Member States in its capacity as the Secretariat of OIC Statistical Commission (OIC-StatCom) and through its Statistical Capacity Building (StatCaB) Programme.

- During the period under review, SESRIC has made efforts to strengthen intra-OIC South-South cooperation by implementing a wide range of capacity building programmes and training activities on various socio-economic fields of immediate interest to the OIC Member States. Currently, the Centre has 23 sector-specific capacity building programmes covering a wide range of areas such as finance, agriculture, health, water resources, poverty alleviation, disaster risk management, public employment and tourism. These programmes are implemented in close cooperation with relevant national institutions of the OIC Member States through various modalities, including training courses, training workshops and study visits.
- Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), the Centre has undertaken the necessary and timely technical preparations to continue its training activities and keep participants motivated and engaged during this time of global crisis. In this regard, the Centre has achieved to organise all of its planned activities so far in 2021 through its newly adopted distance learning modalities.
- Furthermore, during the period under review, SESRIC signed an agreement with the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 February 2021 to strengthen existing cooperation and explore new ways of collaboration for a better implementation of COMCEC Strategy and Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- Moreover, SMIIC has continued to work on the development of the much-needed common standards in the OIC including the OIC/SMIIC Halal Tourism Standard, which was published in December 2019. SMIIC has conducted 4 training programs on the OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards in order to aid the common use of standards within the OIC.
- In cooperation with Discover Events on behalf of the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT), SMIIC co-organized the 6th World Halal Summit with the theme “Halal for All, Halal in All Aspects, from Production to Consumption” on 21-23 December 2020.

5. Conclusion

Since the 36th Session of the COMCEC there have been slight modifications in the preparation process of COMCEC Sectoral Research Reports and the conduct of Working Group Meetings. In the new methodology, one research report will be prepared for two consecutive Working Group meetings. While the first draft of the report will be submitted to the first meeting, the completed report will be submitted to the second meeting.

In this framework, since the last COMCEC Ministerial Meeting, six Working Group Meetings have been held virtually and deliberated on the impacts of COVID-19 in the relevant sectors. The Meetings attended by the representatives from the Member States, OIC Institutions, relevant international institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, focused on important issues in the six cooperation areas of the COMCEC. The Working Groups considered the first drafts of thematic research reports prepared for the meetings and experiences of the Member States and international institutions.

Within the implementation of the COMCEC Project Funding, under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. However, implementation of these projects postponed to 2021 due to international travel restrictions arising from the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, under the 8th Call for Project Proposals made in September 2020, 5 new projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2021. All the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC website.