

# REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

May 2017

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

## **PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY**

### **1. Introduction:**

The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) has been continuing its efforts with the aim of 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, to contribute to their development efforts and to enhance trade among the Member Countries. 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.

In order to make the COMCEC a more fruitful platform to meet the growing needs of the OIC Member States, the 4<sup>th</sup> Extra-ordinary Islamic Summit Conference held on 14-15 August 2012 in Mecca, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has adopted the COMCEC Strategy.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference hosted by the Republic of Turkey on 10-15 April 2016 in İstanbul, Turkey, *“expressed its profound appreciation for the successful implementation of the COMCEC revised statute and strategy adopted at the 4th Extraordinary Summit. It called on Member States to enhance the implementation of the revised COMCEC statute and strategy, in close coordination and cooperation with the General Secretariat and in accordance with the OIC Charter, and requested Member States to continue to actively participate in the work of the COMCEC under the chairmanship of H.E. Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN, President of the Republic of Turkey.”*

The COMCEC Strategy brought a new dynamism 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. Accordingly, COMCEC serves as a forum among the Member States for exchanging experiences and good practices, disseminating knowledge and approximating policies. Member States showed a great interest and support to the implementation instruments of the Strategy namely the COMCEC Working Groups and the COMCEC Project Cycle Management during the four years of Strategy’s implementation.

The COMCEC Working Groups offer a policy dialogue platform for sharing knowledge and experience among the OIC Member Countries. Research reports are conducted for each Working Group Meeting to reveal the situation related to the specific theme of the Meeting. Some of the member countries are studied in detail in these reports through field visits, surveys and interviews. Moreover, sectoral Outlooks are prepared annually and submitted to these Meetings to explore global trends and current situation in the member countries.

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 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings were held in the February-April period. All the publications regarding the working group meetings namely the analytic studies, sectoral outlooks and the proceedings of the 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. In 2016, 9 projects have been implemented successfully by the Member Countries and OIC Institutions. Through these projects, about 30 member countries benefit from the COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, 15 new projects have been found eligible for funding for 2017. The Fifth Project Call will be made in September 2017.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

## **2. Resolutions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy**

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC was held on 21-24 November 2016 in İstanbul, Republic of Turkey. The Session was informed by the COMCEC Coordination Office on the progress achieved towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. After fruitful deliberations, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC adopted the following resolutions for ensuring the effective implementation of the COMCEC Strategy:

The Session welcomed the Progress Report submitted by the COMCEC Coordination Office highlighting the progress achieved in the implementation of the Strategy; commended the Member States and OIC Institutions for their valuable contributions to its implementation and requested the Member States and OIC Institutions to further their full support to the implementation of the Strategy.

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 February-March and September-November 2016. The Session welcomed the finalization of the fourteen projects funded under the COMCEC Project Funding in 2015 and the progress achieved in the implementation of the nine new projects under the third project call in 2016, and also welcomed the fourth project call, made by the COMCEC Coordination Office in September 2016.

Furthermore, 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 and benefit from the COMCEC Project Funding for realizing their cooperation projects

The Session welcomed the holding of the Fourth Annual Coordination Meeting of the COMCEC Working Group Focal Points, organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office on 1-2 June 2016 in Ankara, Turkey and called on the COMCEC National Focal Points and

working group focal points to work more closely with the COMCEC Coordination Office for effective coordination and communication. The Session also called upon the Member States concerned to respond to the “Evaluation Forms” circulated each year by the COMCEC Coordination Office with a view to following-up the implementation of the Policy Recommendations of the COMCEC Working Groups.

The Session requested the COMCEC Coordination Office 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.

### **3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy**

#### **3.1. Meetings of the COMCEC Working Groups**

In line with the relevant resolutions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC, the 9<sup>th</sup> round of COMCEC Working Groups was held in February-April 2017 (8<sup>th</sup> for the Financial Cooperation Working Group). Apart from the relevant public institutions, representatives from the private sector and NGOs of the Member Countries, as well as relevant international organizations are also invited to working group meetings for enabling the reflection of a wide range of stakeholders’ perspective during the discussions.

For these meetings, 6 research reports have been published by the COMCEC Coordination Office. After each WG Meeting, a proceedings document was published in order to reflect the outcomes of the meetings including the summaries of the presentations and discussions made during the meeting. All the publications regarding the working group meetings namely the research studies, sectoral outlooks and the proceedings of the meetings are available in e-book format on the COMCEC website: (<http://ebook.comcec.org>)

In line with the regular practice for each WG Meeting, the working groups have continued to conduct a policy debate session in their deliberations. The participants discuss policy recommendations on the theme of the meeting derived from the research studies as well as the responses by Member Countries to the policy questions, which are communicated to the focal points before each WG meeting. These policy recommendations will be submitted to the Ministerial Session for consideration and adoption.

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

##### **3.1.1. COMCEC Trade Working Group**

Trade facilitation has become one of the important topics in the global economic agenda. The COMCEC Trade Working Group (TWG) has been focusing on trade facilitation issues in its recent meetings, which is also one of the important output areas of the COMCEC Strategy.

Trade facilitation can reduce trade costs prominently. According to OECD estimations, harmonizing trade documents, streamlining trade procedures, making trade-related information available and using automated processes can reduce total trade costs by 14.5 percent for low-

income countries, 15.5 percent for lower-middle-income countries and 13.2 percent for upper-middle-income countries.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Trade Working Group has elaborated on an important instrument of trade facilitation, which is Single Window Systems. The TWG has convened on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “*Single Window Systems in the OIC Member Countries.*” During the Meeting, the participants deliberated on the conceptual framework, global practices and trends in single windows and the current status of the OIC Member Countries regarding the implementation of the Single Window Systems.

Single window systems serve as the platforms for the exchange and processing of electronic information between traders, government agencies, and private operators. The research report prepared for the meeting highlighted the importance of single window systems for facilitating trade by offering a single point of contact and single submission for import, export and transit relevant formalities. The report indicated that, at present, 23 Member Countries have been benefiting from the single window systems, whereas 4 member countries are in the process of establishment of a system. Furthermore, 11 member countries have a vision to establish their single window systems<sup>2</sup>.

There are major challenges faced by the Member Countries during the initiation and implementation processes of the single window systems. In this regard, weak quality of preparatory work, non-implementation of necessary legal and regulatory changes, inflexibility and lack of interoperability of the systems, and insufficient IT architecture and infrastructure are some of the main challenges faced in this field. In order to address these challenges, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Strengthening Single Window efforts in OIC Member States by developing integrated Single Window strategies that reflect national and regional requirements and actively engage the stakeholders in this process
- Improving the effectiveness of Single Window projects by identifying and implementing necessary changes in the laws and regulatory framework and operational practices,
- Prioritizing flexibility, scalability, safety and interoperability of IT architecture of Single Windows Systems,
- Promoting cross-border interconnectivity and interoperability of the national Single Window Systems in the OIC Region towards establishing Regional Single Window Systems

The 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Trade Working Group will be held on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 under the theme of “Special Economic Zones in the OIC Member States: Learning from Experiences.”

---

<sup>1</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Single Window Systems in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Single Window Systems in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

### **3.1.2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group**

Broadband is a critical infrastructure for fostering economic growth and citizen welfare. With its spill over effect it also contributes to household income through raising the efficiency in labour markets and enhancing the population digital skills.

Considering its importance, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) has devoted its ninth meeting to the broadband internet penetration. During the 9th TCWG Meeting, which was held on March 16th, 2017 with the theme of “Increasing Broadband Internet Penetration in the OIC Member Countries”, the discussions specifically focused on the conceptual framework of broadband penetration, overview of the current state of broadband penetration in the world and in the OIC, the challenges faced by Member Countries and the policy recommendations to address them.

According to the research report prepared specifically for this meeting, broadband technology has undergone a dramatic diffusion within the world as well as OIC Member Countries since its introduction in the early 1990s. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 3.5 billion people were internet users by 2016, of which 2.4 billion were from developing countries. Comparing to 7 percent internet penetration in 2000, today 44 percent of the world population has a regular internet access. As of 2015, 14.95 percent of households in the OIC Member Countries was connected to broadband technology, while 29.41 percent of individuals had mobile broadband connectivity. In some OIC Member Countries (such as Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Qatar), fixed broadband household penetration had exceeded 50 percent, while in others (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and UAE) mobile broadband penetration was higher than 70 percent. Yet, the general situation in the OIC Member Countries is not homogeneous about the challenges faced and policies to be implemented regarding broadband development<sup>3</sup>.

The research report specifically prepared for this meeting highlighted the following major setbacks related to road maintenance practices in the OIC Member States:

- Lack of investment of next generation broadband networks
- Limited affordability
- Limited awareness of the potential of the broadband services
- Lack of digital literacy
- Lack of cultural relevance or interest.

In light of the main findings of the aforementioned research report and the deliberations during the 9<sup>th</sup> TCWG, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- a) Policy Recommendations for all OIC Member Countries:
- Preparing national broadband strategies with the involvement of the all relevant stakeholders
  - Enhancing digital literacy by embedding programs in the formal education system and encouraging non-formal initiatives targeting specific segments of the population

---

<sup>3</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Increasing Broadband Internet Penetration in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

b) Policy Recommendations for the OIC Member Countries with Different Stage of Broadband Development:

1. OIC Member Countries at advanced stage<sup>4</sup> of broadband development
  - Achieving high-speed Internet coverage in rural and isolated areas through regulatory holidays<sup>5</sup> and direct subsidies with the purpose of improving the broadband investment business case
  - Enactment of financial incentives to operators for deploying 4G
2. OIC Member Countries at an intermediate stage<sup>6</sup> of broadband development
  - Reducing cost of broadband services through targeted public policy initiatives
  - Lowering the cultural and linguistic barriers through development of local platforms, content, and applications.
3. OIC Member Countries at initial stage<sup>7</sup> of broadband development
  - Offering a low-priced broadband service for consumers by state-owned and government subsidized telecommunications operators
  - Offering a low-priced or free broadband service targeted for disadvantaged segments of the population

The 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group will be held on 18-19 October, 2017 in Ankara with the theme of “Improving Transnational Transport Corridors among the OIC Member Countries”. This meeting is expected to come up with a set of policy recommendations which will be submitted to the Ministerial Exchange of Views Session of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the COMCEC.

### 3.1.3. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT), as a sub-sector of tourism, has a great potential and considerable share in the global tourism market. The Muslim population is expected to increase to 2.2 billion by 2030, which would be a key catalyst for the growth of the MFT sector.

Given the importance of MFT sector in tourism area, COMCEC has devoted its three Tourism Working Group Meetings to Muslim-Friendly Tourism. During the 9<sup>th</sup> Tourism WG Meeting, held on February 16th, 2017 with the theme of “Muslim-Friendly Tourism: Regulating Accommodation Establishments in the OIC Member Countries”, the discussions focused on regulating MFT accommodation establishments, particularly overview of the current state of MFT accommodation sector in the world and the OIC, as well as the challenges faced by the Member Countries.

The research report prepared for this Meeting highlighted that Muslim inbound tourism arrivals in the OIC member countries are estimated to be 53.8 million in 2016 and 74.8 million in 2020. On the other hand, Muslim outbound tourism expenditure from OIC member countries was \$108.8 billion in 2015 and it is expected to reach \$179.5 billion in 2021.

---

<sup>4</sup> OIC Member Countries at advanced stage refers to the countries which have high coverage and adoption of broadband internet.

<sup>5</sup> Regulatory holiday refers to the absence of some regulatory obligation to provide access, at least for a predefined period of time.

<sup>6</sup> OIC Member Countries at intermediate stage generally have advanced coverage but limited broadband penetration.

<sup>7</sup> OIC Member Countries at initial stage refers to the countries which need to increase both supply and demand for broadband services. For those countries, a combination of infrastructure deployment incentives and demand stimulation policies are required to increase broadband penetration.

According to the survey conducted for the report, Muslim tourists become more Halal conscious, and prefer Muslim-Friendly services. In terms of services and products rated as extremely important, Halal food came at the top with 83.3 percent and it is followed by providing Qibla direction in rooms with 61.1 percent. Offering Ramadan services, having a separate gym for women, providing family-friendly entertainment, separate spa facilities for women and no alcohol policy in the accommodation establishments are also rated as extremely important by more than half of the respondents.

In light of the main findings of the aforementioned research report and the deliberations during the TWG, the following challenges were identified:

- Different requirements/quality standards for MFT and conventional accommodation establishments.
- The existence of various MFT standards
- The complexity of evaluating Halal elements in the hospitality industry
- The shortage of experienced inspectors in the accommodation sector
- Low adoption rate of MFT standards by accommodation providers
- The complexity of the procedures for adoption, implementation and inspection

In light of the identified challenges, the Working Group has come up with the Draft COMCEC MFT Guideline for Regulating Accommodation Establishments. The guideline document is available on the COMCEC Website as the annex of the Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (<http://ebook.comcec.org>).

The 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism WG will be held on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 in Ankara with the theme of “Risk and Crisis Management in Tourism Sector: Recovery from Crisis in the OIC Member Countries”.

### **3.1.4. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group**

World population is expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, which implies that global food supply needs to be increased by 60 percent in order to meet the growing food demand. This requires a remarkable increase in agricultural productivity and reduction in food losses and waste.

According to the FAO, every year 32 percent (approximately 1.3 billion tonnes) of the food produced in the world for human consumption gets lost or wasted. The economic value of food losses and waste amounts to roughly 680 billion USD in developed countries and 310 billion USD in developing countries.<sup>8</sup> Reduction in food losses and waste could have an immediate and significant impact on an important part of the population in the OIC Region. Furthermore, the pattern and size of food losses and waste throughout the food supply chain remains poorly understood in the vast majority of the OIC Member Countries.<sup>9</sup>

Given the importance of food losses and waste, the COMCEC Agriculture WG has devoted its three meetings to different dimensions of this subject. In this regard, the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the

---

<sup>8</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Reducing Postharvest Losses in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Reducing Food Waste in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.



Agriculture WG was held on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 with the theme of “Reducing Food Waste in the OIC Member Countries”.

According to the research report conducted for the Meeting, there are significant differences between developed and developing countries with regards to food waste. In this respect, in Europe and North America 280-300 kg of food waste is generated per year per person, while in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia 120-170 kg per person is generated per year. Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, consumers are only responsible for 3.5 percent of food waste generated in the region, with the rest generated before consumption. Regarding the types of food waste, fruits and vegetables have the highest level of waste, followed by roots and tubers and cereals. Poor planning of purchases, confusion about date labelling, poor storage or stock management and poor food preparation are the major reasons of food waste.<sup>10</sup>

In line with the main findings of the aforementioned report and the discussions during the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting, the Agriculture Working Group put forward the following policy recommendations:

- Developing a specific legislative framework and road map for reducing food waste in a holistic context including supply chain
- Promotion of food banks and food distribution networks
- Conducting cohesive initiatives and campaigns to increase awareness on food waste in supply chain and consumption

The 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group will be held on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 with the theme of “Improving Agricultural Market Performance: Creation and Development of Market Institutions”.

### **3.1.5. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group**

Malnutrition is one of the major reasons of poverty cycle throughout generations, especially when it is experienced in early life. It also adversely affects health, education, and immediate as well as future income. Furthermore, malnutrition has negative effects on productivity and thus the economic growth, especially in the countries where a high incidence of chronic undernourishment exists.<sup>11</sup>

Given the importance of the issue, the Ninth Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group was held on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Malnutrition in the OIC Member Countries: A Trap for Poverty”.

The research report, which was specifically prepared for this meeting, revealed that the OIC Member Countries experience high rates of malnutrition across all indicators; tend to underperform when compared to the rest of the (developing) world. Stunting rate in the OIC is 33 percent, which is above the high prevalence threshold defined by the WHO (30 percent). This rate is 13 percent higher than in the rest of the world. According to report, one-third of the children under-5 years of age is stunted (too short for their age) and 11 percent of the same group is wasted (too thin for their height) in the OIC Member Countries.

---

<sup>10</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Reducing Food Waste in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Malnutrition in the OIC Member Countries: A Trap for Poverty, 2017.

As highlighted in the report and during the discussions in the Meeting, the following challenges were identified:

- Inadequate Infant and Young Children Feeding (IYCF) practices - including breastfeeding,
- Lack of access to nutritious food
- Seasonal hunger due to lean/drought seasons,
- Poor access to improved water and sanitation infrastructures,
- Insufficient access to maternal and reproductive healthcare,
- Low levels of health spending,
- Low and inefficient coordination mechanisms to address malnutrition.

To overcome these challenges, the Working Group came up with the following policy recommendations:

- Developing and implementing nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, especially towards women of reproductive age from vulnerable groups
- Improving infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices
- Ensuring universal access to healthcare, safe water and sanitation, and launching educational campaigns on infectious diseases to eliminate all forms of undernutrition
- Providing access to safe and nutritious food for all with community-based initiatives and by forming resilient capacities for food-security

Moreover, the 10th Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group will be held on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Ankara with the theme of “Education of Disadvantaged Children in OIC: The Key to Escape from Poverty.”

### **3.1.6. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group**

Public debt became an integrated part of public finance after 1980s all over the world. It is used as a tool to develop financial markets, to regulate capital movements, and to determine risk-free rate as well as to finance budget deficits.

Since public debt constitutes the biggest financial portfolio in many countries, effective public debt management has become essential for economic stability. In the last two decades, a number of financial crises occurred mainly due to public debt problems. Financial stress experienced recently by some Euro Area countries revealed that unhealthy public finances might cause economic disturbances for all countries regardless of their economic development level.

Taking its importance into consideration, the 8th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) was held on March, 30th 2017 in Ankara with the theme of “Improving Public Debt Management in the OIC Member Countries.” The working group deliberated on the debt management practices in the world and the OIC Region including public debt dynamics, debt management structures and institutional frameworks.

According to research report prepared for the Meeting, the average public debt level during the 1980-2015 period was between 40 and 80 percent of GDP in the world. While the ratio of public debt to GDP of the Member Countries varies between 3 and 138 percent, the average public debt to GDP ratio was 36.7 and 46.1 percent in 2012 and 2015 respectively in the OIC

Region. The public debt to GDP ratio in the OIC Region is expected to reach 51.1 percent by the end of 2017. The decline in oil prices in recent years has also led to an increase in budget deficits<sup>12</sup>.

The following challenges were highlighted by the FCWG:

- Effects of Macroeconomic shocks on the structure of the public debt: exchange rate risk, higher re-financing risk, interest rate risk
- Unclear institutional responsibilities for public debt management
- Lack of formal debt management strategy
- Dependency on external borrowing caused by underdeveloped domestic public debt markets
- Short average maturity of public debt, especially concerning debt held by the private sector
- Crowding-out of bank loans to the private sector

To overcome these challenges, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Strengthening/Setting up an independent Public Debt Management Unit with well-defined functions and a dedicated debt management strategy
- Developing/improving domestic debt market
- Broadening and diversifying the creditor base
- Lengthening the average maturity of the public debt
- Applying macroeconomic risk management methods.

Moreover, the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group will be held on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 with the theme of “Diversification of the Islamic Financial Instruments.”

### **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 also improves the institutional and human capacity of the relevant institutions and ministries of the Member Countries working on the cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy. Each funded project is implemented through the cooperation of at least

---

<sup>12</sup> COMCEC Coordination Office, Improving Public Debt Management in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

three member countries. From this point of view, this mechanism 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.

In 2016, 9 projects within the framework of this instrument have been successfully implemented. Through the COMCEC Project Funding, considering the fact that at least two or more Member Countries participate as partners, not only the project owners, but also the project partners benefit from the services provided. In this regard, more than 30 countries in 2016 have reaped the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding.

The implementation phase of the 15 final-listed projects have begun in April 2017 under the Fourth Project Call made in September 2016. Through these projects, more than 45 member countries will benefit from the COMCEC Project Funding. Table 1 below shows the List of Projects that are financed by the COMCEC Coordination Office for the year 2017.

**Table 1: Final List of Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding in 2017**

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Gambia	Indonesia and Nigeria	Agriculture	Reduction of Post-Harvest losses in Cereals for Improving Rural Livelihood
2	Indonesia	Brunei Darussalam, Egypt, Malaysia and Sudan	Agriculture	Improving Income of Small and Medium Scale Farmers through Reducing Losses of Livestock Production
3	Uganda	Ivory Coast, Gambia, Sudan and Turkey	Agriculture	Strengthening Capacity for Setting, Checking and Compliance of Quality Standards for Agricultural Products
4	Albania	Azerbaijan and Turkey	Poverty Alleviation	Creation of a Road Map for an Integrated Social Service for Housing
5	Gambia	Senegal and Sierra Leone	Poverty Alleviation	Training on Entrepreneurship and Management of Small Business for Women
6	Indonesia	Malaysia and Turkey	Poverty Alleviation	Strengthening Community-Based Sustainable Livelihood for Activating Poor by Opening Marketing Channel through E-Commerce
7	Suriname	Guyana and Nigeria	Poverty Alleviation	Professionalization of Childcare in Selected OIC Countries
8	Gambia	Nigeria and Senegal	Tourism	Developing a Training and Certification Program for the Muslim Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Industry
9	Mozambique	Mali and Senegal	Tourism	Enhancing Capacity of Muslim Friendly Tourism Workforce
10	Sudan	Chad and Djibouti	Tourism	Enhancing The Capacity of Craft Producers & Customers service
11	SESRIC	18 Member Countries	Tourism	Training Program on the Development and Promotion of Muslim Friendly Tourism in COMCEC Member Countries
12	Palestine	Algeria and Saudi Arabia	Trade	Facilitating Trade Relations between Palestine and Islamic Countries
13	Suriname	Guyana and Turkey	Trade	Strengthening of SME Support Services in Suriname and Guyana to Enhance Participation in Global Value Chains
14	ICDT	Morocco, Senegal and Egypt	Trade	Facilitating Trade: Identifying Non-Tariff Barriers among the OIC Member States
15	Ivory Coast	Burkina Faso and Mali	Transport and Communications	Improving the Capacity on Road Safety in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali

Furthermore, the successful projects, COMCEC Project Funding Training Program was organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the Development Bank of Turkey on 22-23 March 2017 in Ankara, Turkey. The fifth project call will be made in September 2017.

#### **4. The Role of COMCEC National and Working Groups Focal Points in the Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy**

Focal points play a crucial role for the realization of the COMCEC Strategy. The Member States wishing to participate in the COMCEC Working Groups need to register and notify their focal points for each working groups. During November 2016-April 2017 period, the number of the Member Countries which registered to at least one working group has reached to 50.

Successful implementation of the COMCEC Strategy is only possible with the invaluable contributions and active support of the Member Countries. In this respect, the COMCEC Working Group Focal Points have a crucial role, through the Working Groups and the COMCEC Project Funding, in mobilizing the Member Country's institutional and human resources to the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. Additionally, COMCEC National Focal Points have a vital role in coordinating the relevant Ministries/ Institutions in their respective Countries.

In this regard, since the launch of the COMCEC Strategy in 2013, the CCO organizes annual focal points meetings with a view to providing a regular platform for interaction between the COMCEC Secretariat and the Member Countries with the ultimate aim of improving the implementation of both instruments of the COMCEC Strategy. In each Meeting, the focal points have provided invaluable feed-back, which contributed to the success of the Strategy's implementation. These meetings have proven themselves as important gatherings, demonstrating the member-driven character of the COMCEC.

In this regard, COMCEC Coordination Office will organize 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Coordination Meeting of the COMCEC Working Group Focal Points on 23-25 May 2017, in Ankara, Turkey. This meeting will provide an opportunity for the member countries to provide their comments and observations regarding implementation of the Strategy: The Working Groups and COMCEC Project Funding. Through this interactive gathering, the COMCEC Focal Points will discuss, among others, the following topics:

- The COMCEC Strategy and the status of progress in its implementation through the mechanisms, namely Working Groups and COMCEC Project Funding,
- The challenges regarding the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Recommendations at the Ministerial level and the issues related to their effective follow-up,
- Ensuring the contribution of the member countries to the "knowledge production" efforts of the COMCEC, particularly their feedbacks to the research reports including the field visits and surveys conducted during their preparation.
- The themes of the Working Groups for the period of 2018-2020.

Furthermore, a training session on the COMCEC Project Funding will be provided, whereby the participants will be informed on the details of the project submission under the fifth project call to be made in September 2017.

## **5. Activities by the OIC Institutions Serving to the Objectives of the Strategy**

Apart from the Working Group meetings and COMCEC Projects, relevant OIC Institutions are also undertaking programs, projects and activities which serve to the objectives of the Strategy. Below, such projects and activities held since the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC are provided.

Regarding the implementation of the TPS-OIC, which is the flagship project of the COMCEC in the area of trade, Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) continues to organize awareness-raising events and seminars on TPS-OIC and its protocols for the government officials and private sector in the member countries. In this framework, ICDT will organize “the Training Seminar for the benefit of the Member States of the Asian Countries on the Trade Preferential System among the OIC Member States (TPS-OIC)” in collaboration with the IDB on 13-14 September 2017 in Jakarta/Indonesia.

Moreover, various fairs and exhibitions are hosted by the Member Countries in cooperation with the ICDT in line with the relevant resolutions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC. In this regard, the following sector specific fairs and exhibitions will be organized in 2017:

- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will host the “10th Exhibition of Agribusiness Industries of the OIC Member States” in Jeddah on 10-13 April 2017,
- The Republic of Azerbaijan will host the “1st Exhibition of Sport Equipment and Leisure of the OIC Member States” in Baku on 13-15 May 2017 in collaboration with Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation,
- The Arab Republic of Egypt will host the “3rd Tourism Fair of the OIC Member States” in Cairo on 18-21 October 2017,
- Republic of Senegal will host “1st OIC Green Economy Expo” on 26-29 October 2017 and “1st OIC Fisheries and Marine Expo”, in 2017 in Dakar,
- The Republic of Turkey will host the “5th OIC Halal Expo” in Istanbul on 23-26 November 2017 in cooperation with SMIIC,

Furthermore, within the framework of the implementation of technical assistance for the OIC Member States on WTO issues, ICDT has organized “Training Workshop on Trade in Services for OIC Member States” on 22-24 March 2017 in Casablanca, Morocco in cooperation with the IDB Group and SESRIC.

Moreover, since 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC, SMIIC has organized the World Halal Summit on the sidelines of the 10th SMIIC General Assembly Meeting on 15-17 December 2016 in Istanbul. SMIIC has also organized SMIIC Information System Training on 19-21 April 2016 in Turkey.

In the area of tourism, the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) was held on 21-23 December 2015 in Niamey/Republic of Niger. The 10th Session of the ICTM will be held on 12-14 November 2017 in Bangladesh.

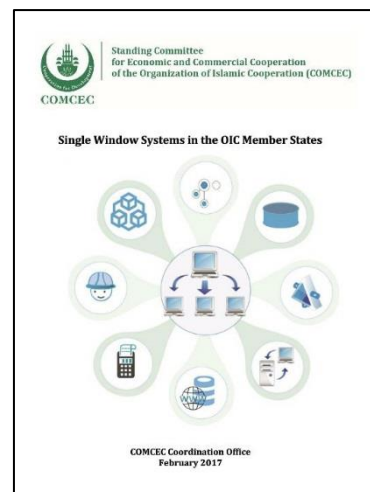
Moreover, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum provides a regular communication channel for the private sector representatives of the Member Countries. In this regard, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, which serves as the Secretariat of the Forum, will organize the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum with the theme of “Crisis Communication and Management in Tourism:

Recent Challenges and Solutions in the OIC Member Countries” on 27 April 2017 in İstanbul, Turkey.

In the field of agriculture, ICCIA organized the Workshop on “Key Infrastructure Development for Rural Growth for OIC Countries” in İstanbul, Turkey on 24-26 April 2017.

## 6. Knowledge Production

The COMCEC aims to produce and disseminate knowledge, share experiences and best-practices, develop a common understanding and approximate policies in cooperation areas to find solutions to the challenges faced by the Member Countries. To that end, the COMCEC Working Group are designed as an instrument for the realization of this mission of the COMCEC. In this regard, research studies are prepared specifically for each WG meeting to form a basis for the discussions made during the Meetings.



Each research report focuses on the specific theme of the Working Groups and is prepared by world-class consulting firms, international organizations having experience on the specific theme or academicians from high-ranking universities around the world. The COMCEC Coordination Office conducts the reports in close cooperation with the consultants to ensure high-quality research studies. The studies begin with a conceptual framework and an overview of the specific theme in the world and the member countries, followed by an in-depth analysis of a few member countries based on field visits, surveys and interviews. At the end of each report, some policy recommendations are given for the Member Countries as well as international cooperation efforts under the umbrella of the COMCEC.

Moreover, sectoral outlooks are prepared annually for each cooperation area. These documents are prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office with a view to exploring the global trends and current situation in the OIC Member Countries in the respective area and enriching the discussions during the Working Groups Meetings by providing up-to-date data.

Furthermore, Proceedings documents are produced after each Working Group Meeting to reflect the discussions including the summaries of the presentations made during the Meetings. These documents are circulated to all the focal points and participants.

Since the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC six research reports on the themes of the working groups and six proceeding documents have been prepared. All these publications are available on the COMCEC web-site accessible in e-book format at COMCEC E-book Website: <http://ebook.comcec.org/>

## 7. Conclusion

The COMCEC Strategy has brought a new dynamism to economic and commercial cooperation efforts under the auspices of the COMCEC. The COMCEC Working Groups, being one of the implementation instruments of the Strategy provided the opportunity for the Member States to discuss important issues at the technical level in the cooperation areas. During the past meetings of the Working Groups, the discussions focused on identifying the

common obstacles, sharing the success stories and exchanging views on possible policy options for addressing common problems in the respective fields.

Since the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings have been held in Ankara, Turkey. The Meetings which have been participated 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 Meetings considered thematic research reports and sectoral outlooks prepared for the meetings and experiences of the Member States and international institutions. In total, 6 research reports and 6 proceedings were published by the COMCEC Coordination Office since the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the COMCEC.

Moreover, within the implementation of the COMCEC Project Funding, the Fourth Project Call was made in September 2016 and after the evaluation of submitted project proposals from the Member Countries and OIC Institutions, 15 projects have been identified for funding. Finally, the Fifth Project Call will be made in September 2017.

-----