



REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

April 2019

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

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 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. The Member States showed a great interest and support to the implementation instruments of the Strategy namely the COMCEC Working Groups and the COMCEC Project Funding during the past six years of Strategy's implementation.

The COMCEC Working Groups provide a regular platform for sharing knowledge and experience among the OIC Member Countries. A research report is conducted for each Working Group Meeting to reveal the state of affairs in the member countries 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 34th 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 research reports, sectoral outlooks and the proceedings of the meetings are available on the COMCEC website in e-book format (<http://ebook.comcec.org/>).

The Working Groups have continued to conduct policy debate sessions in their deliberations. The Member Country experts discuss policy recommendations on the theme of the meeting based on intensive research 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 are then referred to the Ministerial Session for consideration and adoption. Accordingly, the recommendations of the 13th round of WG meetings (12th for Financial Cooperation WG) will be submitted to the 35th Session of the COMCEC to be held in November 2019 for consideration and necessary action. Moreover, the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations is included in the COMCEC Annual Progress Reports. The COMCEC Annual Progress Report 2018 is available on the COMCEC e-book website (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 2018, 17 projects have been implemented successfully by the Member Countries and OIC Institutions. Through these projects, more than 35 member countries benefited from the COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, 24 new projects have been found eligible for funding for 2019. The Seventh Project Call will be made in September 2019.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 34th Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

2. Resolutions of the 34th Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy

The 34th Session of the COMCEC was held on 26-29 November 2018 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 34th 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-April and September-November 2018. The Session welcomed the finalization of the thirteen projects funded under the COMCEC Project Funding in 2017 and the progress achieved in the implementation of the seventeen new projects under the fifth project call in 2018, and also welcomed the sixth project call, made by the COMCEC Coordination Office in September 2018.

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 invited the Member Countries to utilize more the COMCEC Project Funding to implement the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations.

The Session welcomed the holding of the Sixth Annual Coordination Meeting of the COMCEC Working Group Focal Points, organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office on 3-5 July 2018 in Ankara, Turkey and called upon the relevant Member States to respond to the “Evaluation

Forms” circulated each year by the COMCEC Coordination Office with a view to following-up the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations. Moreover, the Session also 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 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 34th Session of the COMCEC, the 13th round of COMCEC Working Group Meetings was held in February-April 2019 (12th 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 were 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 discussed 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)

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.¹ Moreover, accessing the information regarding the customs regulations, formalities, procedures and other relevant issues timely and properly is vital for traders. Lack of well-timed and accurate information brings about higher costs on commercial operations. Public availability of information on trade-related laws, regulations and procedures enables traders to take their decisions accordingly and operate in a more predictable and transparent trading environment. Therefore, in the first four articles of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, publication and availability of information, consultations with the relevant stakeholders, advance ruling systems, and appeal procedures are highlighted as the important necessities of trade facilitation.

In this respect, the TWG has convened on March 7th, 2019, in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Facilitating Trade: Enhancing Public Availability of Customs Information in the OIC Countries.” During the Meeting, the participants deliberated on the global practices and trends in customs information dissemination and the status of the OIC Member Countries regarding the publicizing trade and customs information. According to the OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators, the OIC average score is above the world average with respect to information availability. However, regarding the involvement of trade community and advance rulings, the OIC average scores are below the world average

Moreover, within the framework of the report submitted to the meeting, field visits were conducted to three OIC member countries namely Bangladesh, Morocco and Senegal to get insights about the policy environment on the subject.

The research report also highlighted the major challenges faced by the Member Countries, among others:

- Need for effective coordination among the border agencies involved in export/import processes.
- Lack of the required capacities and human resources for implementation of custom information system.
- Weak consultation of stakeholders on new draft regulations prior to finalization.
- Insufficient advance publication/notification of new regulations prior to implementation.
- Lack of an effective advance ruling mechanism.

In this regard, the Trade WG has come up with a set of policy recommendations for improving the publication of customs information:

- Encouraging the establishment of a formal consultation mechanism between regulatory authorities and trade community towards ensuring an efficient trade environment for the interest of various stakeholders at the national level.
- Utilizing Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) effectively for the dissemination of trade, especially customs related information.
- Encouraging the development of an effective Advance Ruling System in order to enhance the certainty and predictability of customs operations

¹ COMCEC Coordination Office, Single Window Systems in the OIC Member Countries, 2017.

- Promoting integrated Single Windows (SW) Systems and Trade Information Portals for combining the transaction processing functions of SW Systems with a comprehensive repository of trade-related laws, regulations, rules and procedures.
- Leveraging international and regional cooperation and making use of successful country experiences for promoting trade information availability.

The 14th Meeting of the COMCEC Trade Working Group will be held on October 24th, 2019 under the theme of “Facilitating Transit Trade in the OIC Member Countries with an Emphasis on WTO TFA”.

3.1.2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

Transport and communications infrastructure is a critical component of economic and social development of countries. The economic and productivity growth of a given region is tied closely to its transport infrastructure and transport systems which enable higher productivity through lower logistics costs, inventory savings and access to larger supply and labor markets.

In view of the strategic role of transport in a country's economic development, large transport investments require careful project appraisals and effective transport coordination among the planning agencies and other relevant authorities. In this respect, transport project appraisals are of critical importance to obtain the expected result of an investment as well as preserve the scarce resources of a country. Furthermore, project appraisal is indispensable for determining the value and cost of the transport projects to be funded and implemented. It essentially aims to figure out which projects offer the best value for money. Therefore, improving transport project appraisals is observed among the most important factors affecting the success of a transport investment in a country.

Given its critical importance, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) has devoted its 13th Meeting to the subject of transport project appraisals. Accordingly, the 13th Meeting of TCWG was held on 21st of March 2019, in Ankara, with the theme of “Improving Transport Project Appraisals in OIC Member Countries”. During the meeting, the representatives of the Member States discussed and shared their views and experiences on how to enhance the transport project appraisals in the OIC Member States. Moreover, they discussed the global trends and best practices in the world in order to draw concrete lessons from them.

The research report prepared for this meeting, identified a conceptual framework on the appraisal of transport projects, investigated the global trends and current practices and proposed concrete recommendations for better transport project appraisals in the OIC member countries. Within the framework of the report, three OIC member countries were visited (Iran, Jordan and Nigeria) and transport project appraisal practices in these countries were deeply analyzed. Additional in-depth analyses are conducted for Afghanistan, Mozambique and Saudi Arabia. Next to these case studies, a survey has been carried out focusing on OIC member countries and international practices in order to assess their transport project appraisals implementations.²

The research report highlighted the following major setbacks related to transport project appraisals practices in the OIC geography:

² COMCEC Coordination Office, Improving Transport Project Appraisals in the Islamic Countries, 2019.

- Lack of cooperation and coordination among the relevant public authorities,
- Lack and deficiency of accurate data and statistics,
- Unclear legal and institutional framework, and necessary guidelines on content of project appraisals,
- Lack of a governance system defining clear and separate roles for the institution that reviews and approves the appraisal of projects,
- Inadequate institutional and human capacity to effectively implement project appraisals,
- Lack of ex-post evaluation.

In light of the main findings of the report and the deliberations during the 13th TCWG, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Designing a systematic framework for transport project appraisals, indicating the objectives, types and the utilized methodologies.
- Developing/ Improving manuals and guidelines for ensuring having effective and harmonized transport project appraisals as well as effectively implementing the existing ones.
- Applying transport project appraisals as a main part of a full project cycle and making use of quality data/information as well as the lessons generated from the implementation of the previous project(s).
- Encouraging the enhancement of Improving transport project appraisals capacity through a system of official certification of competences, exchange of experience, training programs, seminars, conferences and workshops etc.

The 14th Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group will be held on October 3rd, 2019 in Ankara with the theme of “Risk Management in Transport Public-Private Partnership Projects in the OIC Member Countries”.

3.1.3. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Tourism has both positive and negative impacts on the community, economy and the natural environment. For a successful tourism development, tourism activities need to be properly planned and managed in a sustainable manner. Sustainability reflects the long-term development of a destination, and a balance between economic, social as well as environmental benefits and costs.

In this regard, the 13th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group was held on February 13th, 2019 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Sustainable Destination Management Development and Institutionalization Strategies in the OIC Member Countries”.

According to the research report submitted to the Meeting, in recent years, tourism has accounted for the largest movement of people across the globe. However, with an estimated 1.5 billion people travelling the world every year, their consumption of natural resources, especially energy and water, is placing severe demands on the resources of many countries. If not properly planned, tourism growth can have negative impacts on a destination’s natural assets, environment, and local communities. Sustainable tourism aims to safeguard the natural and cultural heritage of a destination as well as to ensure the well-being of local communities and the satisfaction of tourists. This requires efficient destination management, continuous monitoring, and the cooperation of tourism stakeholders.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned research report, field visits were conducted to Maldives, Oman and Uganda as the OIC Member Countries’ practices. On the other hand, desk based studies were fulfilled for Palestine, Jordan, Denmark and Italy.

In light of the findings of the research report, the following challenges were highlighted by the Working Group:

- Shortage of ongoing engagement and consultation of stakeholders,
- Absence of umbrella organizations for facilitating coordination among the key stakeholders,
- Lack of awareness,
- Insufficient resources allocated to tourism sustainability,
- Lack of formal procedures for continuous monitoring and reporting on destination sustainability.

The Tourism Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Improving community participation fair representation by offering human resources training, capacity building and certification programs, enhancing local value chain, integrating local production into procurement and minimize leakages, encouraging local entrepreneurship in tourism, conducting media campaigns as well as raising tourist awareness about tourism sustainability.
- Identifying KPIs for sustainable tourism development based on international standards and climate change agreement to monitor each country’s performance against a set of pre-determined indicators and to encourage remedial actions when targets are not met.
- Identifying current and potential tangible and intangible tourism resources by taking into consideration destinations carrying capacity, and their long term protection and survival while avoiding over tourism.

- The required mechanisms (e.g. voluntary contribution, tourist tax, environmental fees) might be introduced to fund the sustainability activities that aim to protect, preserve the local quality of life and minimize the costs associated with tourism.
- Ensuring effective destination planning and marketing in such a way that the supply and demand meet at the optimum level and diversified.

Moreover, the Tourism Working Group, in its 14th Meeting to be held on September 5th, 2019, in Ankara, will focus on “Developing Multi-destination tourism corridors in the OIC Countries”.

3.1.4. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group

While international trade promotes economic growth and creates welfare gains, many developing countries, including the OIC member countries, face serious difficulties that prevent them from fully reaping the benefits of international trade. To help the OIC Member Countries formulate effective measures and policies so as to make greater use of their potential as trading partners in global market as well as within the OIC markets for agricultural products, diverse needs and priorities of the Member Countries need to be examined. Design and implementation of better agricultural trade policies require reviewing the existing state of policies thoroughly and in such a way to allow for identification and removal any inefficiencies and weaknesses. In this respect, COMCEC Agriculture Working Group has held its 13th Meeting on February 21st, 2019 in Ankara with the theme of “Reviewing Agricultural Trade Policies to Promote Intra-OIC Agricultural Trade” and a research report on the same subject was considered by the WG.

According to the research report, there exists considerable protection through high tariff rates within the OIC for certain critical product divisions and products such as sugars and oil seeds, and potential exporters of these products face high applied tariffs imposed by potential importers.

On the other hand, some other key product divisions such as meat are not subject to high tariff protection but still represent low share of intra-regional agricultural trade within the OIC region. Thus, non-tariff measures may also be responsible for limited intra-OIC agricultural trade in certain products. Moreover, the report indicates that in general, the OIC member countries have, on average, fewer trade agreements with other OIC countries than their non-OIC trade agreements. In other words, on average, each OIC member country has 22 preferential trade agreements, and 8.73 of them are with other OIC Member Countries.

Within the framework of the research report, field visits were conducted in Turkey, The Gambia and Morocco and desk based studies were made on Chad, Brazil and Thailand.

The research report identified some factors adversely affecting agricultural trade flows. These are, among others:

- Poor status of marketing knowledge and information;
- Limited financial resources;
- Inadequate technical adaptability of producers and lack of standardization of the products;
- Limited data availability and data reliability in the realm of agricultural trade flows and agricultural trade policy measures (including both the tariff rates and the NTMs);
- Widespread smallholder farming practices across the OIC.

In line with the main findings of the aforementioned report and the discussions during the 13th Meeting, the Agriculture Working Group put forward the following policy recommendations:

- Promotion of Niche Agricultural Products and Halal Certification through product diversification, trademarking, marketing strategies and advertising campaigns.
- Promotion of Commercial Cooperation (e.g. enhancing agricultural investments, removal of business visas, etc) and Non-Commercial Cooperation (e.g. sharing best practices and technical expertise, developing safety standards, etc.) among the OIC Member Countries in the areas related to agricultural trade.
- Promotion of Tariff Reductions and Bilateral Arrangements in key products (e.g. sugar, meat, feeding stuff for animals, oil-seeds, live animals)
- Developing and implementing multilateral trade arrangements (e.g. TPS-OIC - Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC)) with a view to contributing to collaborative and sustainable agricultural trade development.
- Enhancing the capacity of the Member Countries in collection, management and dissemination of agricultural trade data with a view to designing sound and evidence-based agricultural trade policies.

The 14th Meeting of the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group will be held on September 11th-12th, 2019 with the theme of “Increasing the Resilience of the Food Systems in Islamic Countries in Face of Future Food Crises.” This meeting will also make the necessary preparations for the Ministerial Exchange of Views Session of the 35th Session of the COMCEC on “Promoting Sustainable Food Systems in Islamic Countries”.

3.1.5. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

Access to health services is quite important for the living quality and social as well as economic productivity of individuals. A healthy life reduces the likelihood of becoming poor. On the other hand, the cost of health services and drugs as well as the lack of facilities to access to health services are the main challenges for the poor in many countries.

Given the importance of the issue, the 13th Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group was held on April 4th, 2019 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Access to Health Services in the OIC Member Countries”.

The research report prepared for this meeting highlight that the OIC member countries are characterized by lower life expectancy, higher maternal mortality rate and higher under-five mortality rates than non-OIC countries for lower middle-income countries. However, OIC countries are less affected by tuberculosis and HIV than non-OIC countries for the upper middle-income group. It also underlined that physical and financial accessibility of healthcare service tends to be lower in the OIC countries than in non-OIC countries. Availability of nurses and midwives is much lower in low income OIC countries than in low income non-OIC countries, whereas OIC countries invest less in health as a proportion of their GDP and expose their citizens to higher out-of-pocket expenses (OOP) than non-OIC countries.

As highlighted in the research report and the discussions during the Meeting, the following challenges were identified by the Working Group:

- Inadequate health infrastructure and capacity,
- Limited number of health staff,
- Low level of health insurance coverage,
- High out of pocket spending on health,
- Low level of allocated financial resources,
- Inadequate health information management systems and lack of reliable data.

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

- Developing a strategy including a well-designed payment and health insurance schemes to achieve universal health coverage for the poor people
- Promoting the engagement of private sector in the provision of health care under the supervision of public authorities and with a well-designed monitoring mechanism to ensure its quality
- Developing/improving health information management systems through designing an online integrated health information system, allocating required resources to health IT infrastructure and strengthening multi-sectoral coordination mechanism
- Strengthening primary healthcare in poorer areas through encouraging skilled health staff to work in rural and remote areas and promoting community awareness as well as regular screenings

Moreover, the 14th Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group will be held on September 26th, 2019 in Ankara with the theme of “Child and Maternal Mortality in OIC: Progress towards 2030”.

3.1.6. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group

Infrastructure is very crucial in order to realize a proper functioning economy and promote economic growth and alleviate poverty. However, the overall status of infrastructure in the OIC member countries needs to be improved. This requires a huge amount of investment and alternative sources of funding for this purpose. Given its social and ethical principles as well as emphasis on risk-sharing and asset-backed financing, the Islamic finance industry can potentially play an important role in providing financing for infrastructure projects.

Taking the great potential of Islamic Finance into consideration, the 12th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) was held on March 28th, 2019 in Ankara with the theme of “Infrastructure Financing through Islamic Finance in the OIC Member Countries.” The research report prepared for this meeting reveals that investment requirements for the OIC member countries, in which data is available, is estimated at USD 7.2 trillion for the 2016-2040 period. With the current trends, the investments are estimated to be USD 5.6 trillion, which will result in a deficit of USD 1.6 trillion. According to the report, while global shariah compliant assets exceed USD 2 trillion for the 2017-2018 period, the total contribution of the Islamic financial sector in infrastructure financing was only about USD 120 billion. The percentage of assets going to infrastructure sector in the Islamic banking, takaful and sukuk sectors are estimated to be 4.74%, 2% and 11.57% respectively.

Furthermore, in order to enrich the data and analysis in the research report and to get insights about the policy environment on the infrastructure financing through Islamic Finance, field visits were conducted to four OIC member countries namely Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. On the other hand, a desk based study was fulfilled for Malaysia.

The followings are highlighted by the research report as the major challenges of the member countries in utilizing Islamic finance for infrastructure financing:

- Inadequate of legal and regulatory framework
- Lack of standardized Shariah-compliant contract templates for infrastructure projects and infrastructure fund,
- Insufficient human capital,
- Shortages of Islamic banks in investing long-term infrastructure projects,
- Small size of nonbank Islamic financial institutions,
- Lack of innovative models of using zakat and waqf.

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

- Developing Legal and Regulatory Framework to Provide an Enabling Environment for Realizing Large Infrastructure Investments through Islamic Finance,
- Increasing the number and share of Islamic Nonbank Financial Institutions to Enhance the Contribution of Islamic Finance in Infrastructure Investments,
- Developing the Islamic Capital Markets Infrastructure to Facilitate the Issuance of Different Types of Project Sukuk and other Instruments as appropriate for Infrastructure Projects,
- Encouraging Innovative Models to use Islamic Social Sector (i.e., Zakat, Waqf and Sadaqah) to Provide Social Infrastructure Services (such as Education and Health) provided that they are Shariah-compliant,
- Improving capacity and human capital for increasing the use of Islamic Finance for infrastructure financing.

The 13th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group will be held on October 17th, 2019, in Ankara, with the theme of “Improving Takaful Sector in the Islamic Countries.”

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 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 2018, 17 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 35 countries in 2018 have reaped the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding.

The implementation phase of the 24 final-listed projects has begun in April 2019 under the Sixth Project Call made in September 2018. Through these projects, approximately 40 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 2019.

Table 1: Final List of Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding in 2019

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Egypt	Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Sudan and Turkey	Agriculture	Enhancing Capacity and Raising Awareness on Food Waste Management in the OIC Countries
2	Malaysia	Indonesia, Bangladesh and	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Warehousing and Storage Management
3	Turkey	Egypt, Indonesia, Palestine,	Agriculture	Reduction of Food Loss and Waste in the OIC Countries
4	Mozambique	Gambia and Nigeria	Financial Cooperation	Capacity Building on Islamic Finance in Mozambique, Gambia and Nigeria
5	Nigeria	Gambia and Malaysia	Financial Cooperation	Islamic Liquidity Management Instruments for Sustainable Development of Islamic Financial Institutions
6	Turkey	Kuwait, Malaysia, Iran, Palestine, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Gabon, Djibouti and Senegal	Financial Cooperation	Assessment of COMCEC Real Estate Securities Markets and Regulatory Landscapes for Strengthening Capital Markets

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
7	SESRIC	Algeria, Benin, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey	Poverty Alleviation	Digital Skills Development in OIC Countries
8	Afghanistan	Iran, Turkey and Palestine	Poverty Alleviation	Improving the Quality of Education through Information and Communication Technologies in the OIC Countries
9	Nigeria	Turkey, Gambia and Togo	Poverty Alleviation	Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education for Grassroots Empowerment in the OIC Countries
10	Suriname	Turkey and Guiana	Poverty Alleviation	Increasing the Capacity of Vocational Education Centres for the Disabled in the Selected OIC Countries
11	Turkey	Indonesia, Senegal, Tunisia, Iran, Gambia	Poverty Alleviation	Developing Guidelines on Social Safety Net Systems for the OIC Countries
12	Azerbaijan	Cameroon, Iran	Tourism	Destination Management Organization: Conceptual Framework for Azerbaijan, Cameroon and Iran
13	Gambia	Senegal, Nigeria	Tourism	Training of Accommodation Providers in the OIC Member Countries on Muslim Friendly Tourism Standards and Quality
14	Iran	Turkey, Azerbaijan	Tourism	Study on Effective Strategies to Establish Sustainable Muslim Friendly
15	Mali	Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Cote D'Ivoire, Niger, Mauritania, Guinea	Tourism	Capacity Building on Destination Management Organizations of OIC Member Countries
16	Mozambique	Malaysia, Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria	Tourism	Improving Human Capacity on Muslim Friendly Tourism for Regulating Accommodation Establishments in the OIC Member Countries
17	ICDT	Suriname, Turkey, Malaysia	Tourism	Developing Muslim-Friendly Tourism in Guyana and Suriname
18	Indonesia	Malaysia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam,	Trade	Empowering Halal Industry to Boost Intra-OIC Trade
19	Lebanon	Turkey, Kuwait,	Trade	Supporting Cooperatives to Enhance Their Access to OIC Markets
20	Palestine	Algeria, Indonesia	Trade	Introduction of Palestinian Export Products to Selected OIC countries
21	SMIIC	Turkey, Malaysia	Trade	Increasing Public Halal Awareness in OIC countries
22	The Gambia	Senegal, Nigeria, Turkey	Transport and Communication	Improving Human and Institutional Capacity for Integrated Database Management System in the OIC Countries
23	Iran	Oman, Qatar, Pakistan, Turkey	Transport and Communication	Increasing Seaborne Transport and Trade within the Framework of the TPS-OIC
24	Jordan	Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkey	Transport and Communication	Reconstructing the Old Ottoman Hejaz Railway Line – Phase 2

Furthermore, COMCEC Project Funding Training Program was organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the Development Bank of Turkey on 13-14 March 2019 in Ankara, Turkey. The Seventh Project Call will be made in September 2019.

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

The Member Country 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. The number of the Member Countries which registered to at least one working group is 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 as well as coordinating the relevant Ministries/ Institutions in their respective Countries.

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 the COMCEC Strategy. In each Meeting, the focal points have provided invaluable feedback, 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 7th Annual Coordination Meeting of the COMCEC Working Group Focal Points in July 2019, in Ankara, Turkey. This meeting will provide an important opportunity for the member countries to provide their comments and observations regarding implementation of the Strategy: The Working Groups and COMCEC Project Funding as well as other issues pertaining to the COMCEC. 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 2020-2022.

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 Seventh Project Call to be made in September 2019.

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

The relevant OIC Institutions are also undertaking programs, projects and activities which serve to the objectives of the Strategy. Some of the projects and activities held since the 34th Session of the COMCEC are provided below.

- World Halal Summit 2018 was held in 29 November- 2 December 2018, in İstanbul, Turkey, by SMIIIC under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey with the theme of “Halal and Healthy Life: Awareness and Sustainability”. On the sidelines of the 6th OIC Halal Expo was organized by ICDT in cooperation with SMIIIC.
- ICCIA has co-organized the 4th Egypt Investment Forum with the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, in Cairo, on 2-4 March 2019 with the aim of promoting trilateral cooperation in trade and investment through linking technology providers, with investors and development banks.
- 16th OIC Trade Fair will be held by the ICDT on 7-13 April 2019 in Baghdad, Iraq with the participation of the companies and businesspeople from the Member Countries seeking for business opportunities and partnership.
- 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 hold the 7th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum will be held in 2019 in İstanbul.

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 Groups 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 34th Session of the COMCEC six research reports on the themes of the working groups

have been published. All these publications are available on the COMCEC website 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 recent meetings of the Working Groups, the discussions have 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 34th Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings have been held in Ankara, Turkey. 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 thematic research reports prepared for the meetings and experiences of the Member States and international institutions. In total, 6 research reports were published by the COMCEC Coordination Office since the 34th Session of the COMCEC. The 14th round of the Working Group Meetings will be held in September and October 2019.

Within the implementation of the COMCEC Project Funding, 17 projects implemented in 2018 under the COMCEC Project Funding have served for increasing cooperation among the member countries as well as contributing to the capacity development in project owner and partner countries. Moreover, the Sixth Project Call was made in September 2018 and after the evaluation of submitted project proposals from the Member Countries and OIC Institutions, 24 projects have been selected for funding. Finally, the Seventh Project Call will be made in September 2019.