



**Standing Committee
for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)**

PROCEEDINGS

THE 2ND ANNUAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING OF THE COMCEC WORKING GROUPS (WGs)

**COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
July 2014**



**Standing Committee
for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)**

PROCEEDINGS

**THE 2ND ANNUAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING
OF THE COMCEC WORKING GROUPS (WGs)**

June 4-5th, 2014, Ankara, Turkey

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

July 2014

For further information please contact:

Mr. Mehmet Fidan
Expert

COMCEC Coordination Office
Necatibey Caddesi No: 110/A
06100 Yücetepe
Ankara/TURKEY
Phone : 90 312 294 57 10
Fax : 90 312 294 57 77
Web : www.comcec.org
e-mail : comcec@comcec.org
mfidan@comcec.org
malanbay@comcec.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Opening Remarks	1
2. The COMCEC and COMCEC Strategy	2
3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy	3
4. A Member-Driven COMCEC: Role of the WG Focal Points	4
5. Stages of COMCEC Project Funding and COMCEC Project Cycle Management What We Have Learnt So Far?	6
6. Closing Remarks	9

1. Opening Remarks

The Meeting commenced with a recitation from Holy Quran in line with the tradition of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). At the outset, Mr. M. Metin EKER, Director General of the COMCEC Coordination Office, welcomed all the participants to the 2nd Annual Focal Points Meeting of the COMCEC Working Groups and informed the participants on the structure of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) and its activities.

He stated that COMCEC cooperation activities gained a new momentum with the adoption of the COMCEC Strategy in 2012, and its implementation in 2013. He underlined that the new Mission of the COMCEC, which was defined by the COMCEC Strategy, envisages a Member-driven COMCEC through mobilizing institutional and human resources of the Member Countries to the cooperation efforts under the COMCEC. He stressed that for this purpose, the COMCEC Strategy introduced 2 important instruments: Working Groups (WGs) and Project Cycle Management (PCM).

He expressed that WGs regularly bring together the experts of the Member Countries in Ankara twice a year to produce knowledge, share experience and best practices, and develop a common understanding to approximate policies in the respective cooperation areas with a view to realizing the objectives of the COMCEC Strategy. In this respect, Mr. EKER stated that the WGs have a quite important role in fulfilling the new COMCEC mission and highlighted that effective functioning of the WGs are quite important. Mr. EKER pointed out that the aim of the 2nd Annual Focal Points Meeting of the COMCEC Working Groups is to share observations and comments regarding Working Group Meeting conducted so far to further the cooperation efforts. Mr. EKER continued his speech by informing the participants that up to now three rounds of WG Meetings (except Financial Cooperation WG which were held on twice) were held and 41 Member Countries registered to the Working Groups.

Mr. EKER underlined that the second operational instrument initiated by the COMCEC Strategy is the Project Cycle Management (PCM) which enables the Member States and the relevant OIC Institutions to propose multilateral projects in the cooperation areas identified by the Strategy. He expressed that the PCM approach has been a long-awaited component of the COMCEC cooperation. He told that now there is a mechanism which presents clearly identified procedures, and financial framework for the implementation of the projects to be developed by the Member States. He stated that the first project call within the PCM was made in September 2013. Mr. EKER informed the participants that 10 Member States' and 2 OIC Institutions' projects have been final-listed on March 9th, 2014. He also informed the participants about the signing ceremony for the successful projects held in Ankara, Turkey on April 2nd, 2014. Mr. EKER reiterated that the PCM projects have to be multilateral. Considering this fact, Mr. EKER underlined the importance of networking among the Focal Points. He stated that this Meeting would be a great opportunity for this purpose.

Mr. EKER continued his speech by pointing out some observations regarding the role of focal points in the Member States, as well as in the COMCEC. Mr. EKER underlined that the focal points represent their countries in the Working Groups, but they also represent the COMCEC in their respective countries. He asked Focal Points to reflect COMCEC activities in their Ministries where information on COMCEC may be limited. He also mentioned that the focal points represent

COMCEC in the activities which will be carried out in their countries in the future. Mr. EKER highlighted the lack of awareness of the Member Country delegation attending the COMCEC Meeting and other OIC fora regarding the Working Group efforts. He advised the focal points to inform their Ministries and other authorities about the Working Groups' endeavors and other ongoing efforts under the COMCEC and etc. He also advised all the focal points to attend the delegates coming to the COMCEC Ministerial Meetings and Follow-up Committee Meetings as well as other OIC Meetings. Mr. EKER, finally, introduced the program of the Meeting.

2. The COMCEC and COMCEC Strategy

Ms. Aylin ŞENOL GÜN, Expert at the COMCEC Coordination Office made a presentation on the COMCEC and COMCEC Strategy. In her presentation, she provided general information about the COMCEC and introduced the COMCEC Strategy particularly focusing on its cooperation areas and principles.

Ms. GÜN stated the main objective of the COMCEC is to enhance economic and commercial cooperation among the Islamic countries. She touched upon the main functions of the COMCEC and stressed that the COMCEC is the main multilateral cooperation platform regarding economic and commercial issues of the Islamic World. She added that the COMCEC serves as a central forum to discuss the common development challenges of the Islamic Ummah and provide solutions to them. Ms. GÜN also briefed the participants on the organizational structure of the COMCEC, its place in the organizational structure of the OIC and its main achievements so far.

Ms. GÜN pointed out that a new term for the COMCEC has begun with the COMCEC Strategy adopted by the 4th Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference held in Mecca in August 2012. She briefed the participants on the COMCEC Strategy, particularly focusing on its vision, mission and principles as well as the cooperation areas.

Ms. GÜN informed the participants that the COMCEC Strategy has been built on three principles namely Enhancing Mobility, Strengthening Solidarity and Improving Governance. These principles address the core and persistent challenges of the Islamic World and guided the COMCEC efforts in six cooperation areas defined by the COMCEC Strategy, namely trade, transport and communications, tourism, agriculture, poverty alleviation and finance.

She stated that the Strategy has internal consistency and conceptual integrity. The principles are crosscutting all cooperation areas. The objectives and expected outcomes defined in each cooperation area are designed in light of the principles. At all levels of the Strategy, ranging from the strategic objectives and output areas to the expected outcomes, these principles are given due regard. Furthermore, she gave detailed information about the relationship between the principles and each cooperation area.

Ms. GÜN concluded her presentation by mentioning the implementation mechanism introduced by the Strategy.

3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy

Mr. Selçuk KOÇ, Director at the COMCEC Coordination Office made a presentation titled “Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy”. In his presentation Mr. KOÇ stressed that the main mission of the Working Groups is bridging the information gap in the cooperation areas, shedding light on the current state of Member States on specific themes, identifying the common challenges facing the Member States, introducing success stories, and putting forward the policy options for the Member States.

He further mentioned that Working Groups provide a regular platform for the Member States, and the main goal of the Working Groups is to create a member country-driven platform. In other words, Working Group mechanism envisages a greater country ownership. The Working Groups aim to produce and disseminate knowledge, share experiences and good practices, create a common understanding and approximating policies among the Member States.

Mr. KOÇ expressed that Working Groups were established in each cooperation area of the COMCEC Strategy namely; Trade, Transport and Communications, Tourism, Agriculture, Poverty Alleviation and Finance. Membership to the Working Groups is voluntary. They convene twice a year in Ankara and the working language is English. It was expressed that the participation of the qualified experts from the relevant Ministries/Institutions of the Member States bears great importance for ensuring the quality discussions during the Working Group Meetings.

It was also expressed that three rounds of Working Group Meetings were held till now. Mr. KOÇ informed the participants that analytical studies and sectoral outlooks were prepared for each working group meeting by the COMCEC Coordination Office. These reports were submitted to the Working Group Meetings and the findings of the mentioned reports were discussed during the meetings. He informed the participants of the issues highlighted by the Working Groups conducted so far. He also underlined that active participation of the Member Countries to the meetings at the technical level is crucial to ensure a member driven COMCEC.

Mr. KOÇ concluded his presentation with informing the participants about the themes and dates of the forthcoming Working Group Meetings. He expressed the dates and themes as follows:

- The 4th Meeting of Tourism Working Group will be held on September 4th, 2014 with the theme of “Enhancing the Capacity of Tourism Workforce in the Member States for Improved Tourism Service Quality.”
- The 4th Meeting of Transport and Communications Working Group will be held on September 11th, 2014 with the theme of “Developing Air Linkages to Sustain Tourism among the Member States.”
- The 4th Meeting of Poverty Alleviation Working Group will be held on September 18th, 2014 with the theme of “Analyzing the Institutional Structure of the Social Protection Systems in the Member States”
- The 4th Meeting of Agriculture Working Group will be held on September 25th, 2014 with the theme of “Facilitating Smallholder Farmers' Market Access in the Member States”

- The 4th Meeting of Financial Cooperation* Working Group will be held on October 16th, 2014 with the theme of “Conducting A Risk Management Analysis on Islamic Financial Instruments in the Member States.”
- The 4th Meeting of Trade Working Group will be held on October 23th, 2014 with the theme of “Preferential Trade Agreements and Trade Liberalization Efforts in the OIC Member States with special focus on the TPS-OIC.”

4. A Member-Driven COMCEC: Role of the WG Focal Points

Mr. Selçuk KOÇ, Director at the COMCEC Coordination Office made a presentation titled “A Member-Driven COMCEC: Role of the WG Focal Points”.

In his presentation Mr. KOÇ stressed that the COMCEC is a member driven organization and successful implementation of the COMCEC Strategy depends on the invaluable contributions and active support of the Member Countries. He added that Focal Points have a special role in this regard.

Mr. KOÇ highlighted two main roles of the COMCEC Focal Points which are representing the Member Countries in Working Groups, and mobilizing institutional and human capacity of the Member Countries towards effective implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. Mr. KOÇ expressed that in respect to the second role, Focal Points are requested to inform their relevant Ministries/Institutions about the COMCEC Strategy and its implementation instruments (WGs and PCM), as well as the opportunities presented by the Strategy. Mr. KOÇ also stated that Focal Points are expected to attend the Working Group Meetings together with the qualified and relevant experts in the specific theme of the Working Group.

Mr. KOÇ shared a graph demonstrating the increasing number of participants attending and the Member States registered to the COMCEC Working Groups. Mr. KOÇ stated that 41 Member Countries registered to the Working Groups and expressed that this number will increase in the future.

In the later part of his presentation, Mr. KOÇ mentioned about the expectations from the Focal Points regarding WGs. Mr. KOÇ firstly explained the expectations from Focal Points before the WG Meetings. He stated that it is expected from Focal Points to coordinate the relevant Ministries/Institutions in their Countries to ensure participation in the Meeting. He added that the CCO commissions highly valuable Analytical Reports on the theme of each WG Meetings to enrich deliberations in the Meeting. He also added that WG meetings would be most effective when abovementioned reports are analyzed in detail by the Focal Points together with the relevant experts.

Afterwards, it was expressed that it is highly needed to have Member Countries’ review, observations and critics to improve the quality of the Analytical Reports specifically prepared for the Working Groups. It was also underlined that the importance of experience, information and best practice sharing among the participants during the Meetings contributes to the main objective of the COMCEC. Lastly, he highlighted that in order to have quality discussions the Member Country presentations need to focus on the subject of the Meetings..

Mr. KOÇ concluded his presentation by touching upon the role to be played by the Focal Points after the WG meetings. He expressed the following points in this regard:

- Sharing the outputs of the meetings with the relevant institutions,
- Providing feedback to the CCO for improving the quality of the analytical studies and organization of the meetings,
- As analytical reports may have case studies in the Member Countries, facilitating the field visits to be conducted in their respective countries during the preparation of the analytical studies,
- Informing the delegates participating in the relevant OIC Meetings/COMCEC Sessions about the WGs and their endeavours for ensuring the linkage between the WGs and the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions,
- Raising awareness of the relevant institutions on the COMCEC PCM and ensuring the submission of multilateral cooperation projects under the COMCEC PCM,
- Facilitating the effective communication and coordination with the CCO through following-up the CCO invitation letters and responding to the inquiries of the CCO such as questionnaires in a timely manner,
- Communicating the updated information regarding Focal Points by informing the CCO of any changes in focal points and their contact details.

Discussion Session

After the presentations Mr. Fatih ÜNLÜ, moderator of the session stressed some of the important issues mentioned in Mr. KOÇ's presentation. It was stated that it is highly encouraging to see that participation in the Working Group Meetings shows an increasing trend. It was also expressed that there is an average of 20% increase from second round to third round of WG Meetings. Mr. ÜNLÜ also underlined the importance of awareness-raising efforts by focal points across all levels in their own Ministries/institutions for notification of the member countries to WG is very important. He mentioned that information gained in the COMCEC WG Meetings may thus be reflected into daily operations of focal points in their own Ministries. Mr. ÜNLÜ then gave the floor to the participants of the Meeting.

Several delegates shared their observations with respect to the logistical arrangements of the working group meetings. In this regard, it was stated that coming to the one-day meetings is very costly and time consuming for delegates coming from distant locations. It was proposed that Working Groups can be organized as parallel events at the same dates which enable participants to take rest before taking return flights.

Another observation, after thanking the COMCEC Coordination Office for conducting a number of analytical studies and reports for each meeting, was that it will be very helpful to have Reports also in other languages besides English. It was said that even a summary of the studies in other languages will help. Some other delegates also raised the issue of translation and interpretation of studies, reports and discussions into Arabic and French.

It was also stated that it will be appreciated if the COMCEC Coordination Office can provide dates/venues of coming year's Meetings for timely assignment of budgets for travel expenses in the Working Group Meetings.

Furthermore, it was suggested that some of the Working Group Meetings could also be organized in other countries which have notable experience in the corresponding theme of the Meeting. Having an international conference after the implementation of PCM Projects, in which findings, experiences and outcomes could be shared, was also proposed.

A rotating chairmanship structure for the working group meetings highlighted to promote country ownership and commitment. While expressing their appreciations to the COMCEC Coordination Office for conducting analytical studies specifically for each Working Group Meetings, and the participants stressed that the studies need to be conveyed in advance of the Meetings to make the necessary preparations.

After these observations, the CCO representatives address the comments made by the focal points. With regard to holding parallel Working Group Meetings, It was stated that participants for each Working Group Meetings are different. Hence in such parallel organization method, focal points in six cooperation areas from each cooperation areas would again require to make the trip to Ankara to attend one day Meeting. It was expressed that the COMCEC Coordination Office took note of the suggestion of holding the Meetings more than one day. However, it was expressed that at present there are some budget constraints to accomplish that. Regarding the language issue, it was discussed that past experience shows most of the Working Group participants are comfortable to deliberate on English. It was added that Working Group Meetings are highly technical meetings and translation may sometimes fail to reflect the exact meaning of technical terms and may adversely affect the conclusion of Meeting on time. Financial constraints are also other important reason for conducting the Meeting in one language. Regarding the observation on the early announcement of the Working Group Meetings, the CCO representative thanked for this observation and stated that this observations will be given due regard. Concerning the timely circulation of the analytical studies it was stated that CCO will try its best to circulate the reports ahead of the meetings to provide sufficient time to the focal points to make necessary preparations.

5. Stages of COMCEC Project Funding and COMCEC Project Cycle Management What We Have Learnt So Far?

Mr. Deniz GÖLE, expert from the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO), made two presentations in the margin of the meeting. In the first day (June 4th), he introduced the two stages of the Project Cycle Management (PCM) mechanism under the COMCEC PCM. The stages are identification and formulation; submission and appraisal. Other stages (implementation, payments, monitoring and evaluation) were, on the other hand, presented by the Development Bank of Turkey.

Mr. GÖLE started by describing the purpose of the training which was mainly to illustrate the principles and basics of PCM, key activities to be undertaken at each stage in order to assist Member Countries in project preparation efforts.

In the first few slides, the definition of the term PCM was elaborated so that the audience would have a better understanding regarding the project funding process of COMCEC. He also underlined the major advantages of PCM as well as key principles in the face of several problems.

After underlining the qualifications of the COMCEC PCM which were “simple and clearly defined procedures and financial framework”, Mr. GÖLE proceeded to the first stage, identification and formulation. After emphasizing the stage, grant limits and potential project owners were explained.

From the illustration of the indicative grant limits and co-finance rates for COMCEC projects, it was seen that Member Countries could submit a project with a budget up to USD 250.000 with at least 10 percent co-financing. This amount would be USD 100.000 for the OIC institutions and they required to cover at least 25 percent of the project budget.

It was also emphasized that relevant ministries and public institutions of the Member Countries and the OIC Institutions operating in the field of economic and commercial cooperation could submit projects.

The presentation continued with the explanations on the “Project Selection Criteria” namely, compliance with Strategy’s Principles, targeting strategic objectives of the Strategy, focusing on output areas and pursuing multilateral cooperation among COMCEC Member Countries.

In the following slides, nature of the projects (Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building Projects) and several eligible activities were explained. Some of the eligible activities expressed in the presentation were research, analytical studies, guides, roadmaps, study visits, conferences, workshops etc.

During the presentation, three key actors and their responsibilities under the PCM were identified; Project Owner (Project Submission and Implementation); the CCO (Program Management) and the Intermediary Bank (Project Monitoring and Financing). Moreover, the roles of these key actors throughout the project application process were explained.

At the end of his first presentation, Mr. GÖLE put forward the timeline which begins with the Call for Project Proposals in September 2014 and would end with the beginning of the project implementation period. During these clarifications, the online project submission system, deadlines, sections of the project fiche and several other factors that need particular attention were discussed.

In his second presentation (June 5th), Mr. GÖLE touched upon the “lessons learnt” within the framework of the First Call for Project Proposals under COMCEC PCM.

He started by presenting various statistics and other information for the First Call such as the number of submitted project proposals, number of member countries and OIC institutions which have submitted project proposals.

Mr. GÖLE then started to discuss the advantages possessed during the First Call. He comprehensively described the simple rules, multi-year financial framework and flexible procedures that PCM developed so far. He also underlined the CCO PCM Group’s efforts to ensure beneficiary ownership. Moreover, the importance of result-oriented framework, decentralized structure and continuous support provided by the PCM Group were also emphasized as considerable advantages.

For the next slides, He started to explain several challenges that PCM Group as well as Project owners faced in their project preparation and selection efforts. He pointed out the need to raise focal point awareness and coordination along with to identify concrete activities and verifiable indicators. He further mentioned some capacity and communication problems which must be solved both by the CCO and project owners.

During next section of his presentation, Mr. GÖLE explained the “lessons learnt” during the First Call. He stated that both CCO and project owners needed to work hard to raise focal point awareness and ensure coordination among different stakeholders. He added that CCO is going to be more involved in project activity planning by orienting the project owners during their project preparation efforts. He also emphasized the importance of setting precise performance indicators and further simplification of project documentation. Moreover, Mr. GÖLE introduced two new factors in the system. Firstly, he stated the CCO would embrace “Activity-Based Budgeting” instead of “Item-Based Budgeting” from then on. Secondly, he informed the focal points that PCM Group would set and announce standard market values for budget items for the Second Call. He underlined that some of these changes were already added to the new edition of Program Implementation Guidelines.

In the last section, Mr. GÖLE elaborated the expectations of CCO PCM Group from focal points in order to improve the effectiveness of the project preparation and submission stages as well as ensuring smooth implementation of the process. He kindly asked from focal points for more proactivity and coordination among them and also with CCO. He once again underlined that CCO PCM Group provides continuous support and focal points should not hesitate to request information from the CCO.

He also urged focal points to follow the submission format and timetables. He reminded that the selection process was based on competition and quality rather than quantity. In this sense, he stated that identifying “right” experts and responsible authorities along with setting concrete project activities should be paid particular attention. He, on the other hand, underscored multilateralism as an equally crucial selection criteria. To that end, he pointed out that WG Meetings are good opportunities to build partnerships for projects. Mr. GÖLE concluded his presentation by stressing the importance of taking CCO’s comments into consideration during project preparation efforts of focal points.

Questions and Remarks

After the completion of the presentations on project submission, implementation and monitoring processes of the COMCEC-PCM, various questions relating to all dimension of the PCM were posed to the representatives of the Development Bank of Turkey and the COMCEC Coordination Office. Outstanding issues in the questions asked by the participants were sharing details of the accepted projects, strengthening the communication between project stakeholders, establishing an interactive platform to discuss new project ideas, transparency of the project evaluation process, putting an upper limit for budget sub items, increasing total project limits and communication problems between focal point and responsible authority spring from respective responsible authority is at least general director level. Besides these, participants expressed their suggestions on the issues such as ensuring joint project submission by the member countries, signing of the financial and operational agreement separately, increasing of the duration of the PCM Training Programs, sharing of contact details of all focal points, ensuring the advance payment for the project.

Answers

Mr. GOLE had some remarks on the questions asked by the participants. Firstly, Mr. GOLE stated that it is not possible at this time to share all information about the accepted projects in the COMCEC-PCM since all projects are in the implementation process. However, he expressed that sharing the details of the projects when they are finalized and the issue of strengthening the communication between project stakeholders and partner countries would be considered by the CCO. With regard to increasing total project limits, ensuring transparency of the project evaluation process, putting an upper limit for budget sub items and increasing the duration of the PCM Training Programs, Mr. GOLE mentioned that, the CCO will evaluate suggestions and opinions of distinguished focal points on these issues. Finally, as regards to joint project submission by the member countries, it was emphasized that this was the first year of the PCM and the CCO would evaluate the results of the implementation of the first year, and accordingly joint project submission might be considered by the CCO in the coming years.

6. Closing Remarks

The Meeting ended with closing remarks of Mr. M. Metin EKER, Director General of the COMCEC Coordination Office. Mr. EKER thanked all the participants for their precious attendance and valuable contributions.

Mr. EKER underlined that WG focal points are the building blocks of the COMCEC. He shared some figures to demonstrate the new dynamism taking place in the COMCEC activities since the adoption of the COMCEC Strategy. Mr. EKER stated that before the COMCEC Strategy, there were only 2 international gatherings under the COMCEC directly organized by the COMCEC Secretariat while in 2013, with the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy, this number has reached to 15. Furthermore, before the COMCEC Strategy, the number of reports produced annually by the COMCEC Secretariat was only 2 while in 2013 the number of reports including analytical studies, research reports, outlook reports reached to 30. Mr. EKER also highlighted that from the very beginning of the COMCEC activities in 1984 to 2012, 52 projects have been submitted under the COMCEC and only 2 of them were implemented. Nonetheless, with the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy, in just one project call, 98 project proposals were submitted in 2013. Lastly, Mr. EKER shared the figures regarding the participation in the COMCEC activities. He expressed that until 2012, the number of delegates participating in the annual COMCEC activities was around 400. In 2013, this number reached to 1120 delegates.

After that, Mr. EKER highlighted the role of the COMCEC in the Member Countries. With the WG and PCM mechanisms COMCEC helps to building intellectual and institutional capacity in the Member Countries as well as building capacity in designing multilateral cooperation among the member countries for the common objectives. Mr. EKER encouraged the participants to utilize these instruments.

Mr. EKER underlined that the regular attendance to the WG Meetings by the focal points is essential. He also stressed the need of constructing a knowledge-base for approximating policies among the Member Countries and stated that observations and comments of the focal points on the analytical studies prepared specifically for the WG Meetings would be mostly welcomed in order to improve their quality and to construct the needed knowledge base.



Before concluding his remarks, Mr. EKER thanked again all the participants and wished them a safe trip back home.
