



REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

1. Introduction:

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

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

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 35th Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings were held. 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 15th round of WG meetings (14th for Financial Cooperation WG) will be submitted to the 36th Session of the COMCEC to be held on 23-26 November 2020 for consideration and necessary action.

Moreover, in the wake of the global COVID-19 outbreak, the COMCEC Working Groups, in addition to their regular program of activities, have elaborated on the impacts of COVID-19 on the three important sectors namely agriculture, tourism, and trade through the virtual consultation meetings which were held in June-July 2020 period. The relevant COMCEC Working Groups, in their ad-hoc consultative meetings on the COVID-19 pandemic, discussed the current and potential future impacts of the pandemic consecutively on tourism, trade, and agriculture policies, exchanged expertise and good practices among the member countries, and

deliberated on the cooperation opportunities based on the needs and experiences of the member countries.

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 2019, 22 projects have been implemented successfully by the Member Countries and OIC Institutions. Through these projects, 35 member countries benefited from the COMCEC Project Funding.

Moreover, under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. These projects, however, are yet to be completed due to delays arising from international travel restrictions imposed by COVID 19 pandemic. Hence, some of the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021. On the other hand, the CCO has made the 8th Call on September 1st, 2020. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC website. (cpf.comcec.org)

Furthermore, the CCO has initiated a new capacity building program called COMCEC COVID Response (CCR). The Program aims at assisting member countries with a view to address existing and potential future ramifications of the pandemic. In this regard, the CCO will introduce new modalities under CCR to directly respond member country needs related to the pandemic and call for project proposals by mid-October 2020.

Furthermore, considering the current situation and special conditions in Palestine, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds, the CCO has initiated the Al-Quds Program, which focuses on destination development and management as well as community based tourism in Al-Quds. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine, the program consists of several projects to be carried out between 2020 and 2022.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 35th Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

2. Resolutions of the 35th Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy

The 35th Session of the COMCEC was held on 25-28 November 2019 in İstanbul, Republic of Turkey. The Session was informed by the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) on the progress achieved towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy. After fruitful deliberations, the 35th Session of the COMCEC adopted the following resolutions, among others, for ensuring the effective implementation of the COMCEC Strategy:

- The Session welcomed the Progress Report submitted by the CCO highlighting the progress achieved in the implementation of the Strategy; commended the Member Countries and the OIC Institutions for their valuable contributions to its implementation

and requested the Member States and the OIC Institutions to further their full support to the implementation of the Strategy.

- The Session requested the CCO to regularly report the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy to the COMCEC Sessions, the Follow-up Committee Meetings, and other relevant OIC fora.
- The Session 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 2019.
- The Session welcomed the finalization of seventeen projects funded under the COMCEC Project Funding in 2018 and twenty two new projects implemented in 2019 and also welcomed the 7th Call for Project Proposals made by the COMCEC Coordination Office in September 2019. Taking note of the valuable outcomes of projects previously financed by COMCEC since 2014, the Session invited the Member Countries to intensify their efforts to harness the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding particularly with a view to materialize the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- Furthermore, the Session called upon the relevant Member States to utilize the COMCEC Policy Follow-up System, which has been established by the CCO for the effective follow-up of the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- Commending the efforts of the Member States and the OIC institutions for the realization of COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations, The Session invited all the Member States to exert every effort, to the extent possible, to implement the Policy Recommendations and requested the OIC Institutions to support the Member States to this end through implementing capacity development and training programs for implementation of policy recommendations.
- Taking note of the valuable outcomes of projects previously financed by COMCEC since 2014, the Session invited Member Countries to intensify their efforts to harness the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding, particularly with a view to materialize the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- The Session took note with appreciation that the member countries namely Indonesia, the Gambia, Nigeria, and Turkey have already set up national coordination mechanisms for facilitating the coordination of COMCEC related work particularly the implementation of the COMCEC Resolutions and Ministerial Policy Recommendations at the national level and encouraged the other Member States to set up similar coordination mechanisms for these purposes.
- Moreover, the Session expressed its appreciation to the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group, ICCIA, and SMIIC for their efforts towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.
- The Session also expressed its appreciation to the SESRIC for the activities, particularly capacity building and training programs, contributing to the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations in the six cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy.
- The Session reiterated its request to the OIC Institutions working in the economic and commercial fields to continue coordination with the COMCEC Coordination Office, including through the Sessional Committee, in order to ensure progress and complementarity in the implementation both of the COMCEC Strategy and the OIC 2025: Program of Action, especially in the areas of trade and investment.
- The Session requested the concerned Member States to actively participate in the activities to be organized by the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB

Group (ITFC), ICCIA, and SMIIC in the cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy and called upon these institutions to send invitations to the Member States sufficiently in advance of the meetings so as to ensure their participation.

3. Implementation of the COMCEC Strategy

3.1. Meetings of the COMCEC Working Groups

The 15th round of COMCEC Working Group Meetings was held in July-September 2020 (14th meeting for the Financial Cooperation Working Group). Apart from the relevant public institutions, representatives from the private sector and NGOs as well as relevant international organizations were also invited to working group meetings for enabling the reflection of a wide range of stakeholders' perspectives during the discussions.

In line with the regular practice for each WG Meeting, the working groups have continued to conduct a policy debate session in their deliberations. After intensive deliberations, the Working Groups have formulated concrete policy recommendations, which 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)

Moreover, in the wake of the global COVID-19 outbreak, the COMCEC Working Groups, in addition to their regular program of activities, have elaborated on the impacts of COVID-19 on the three important sectors namely agriculture, tourism, and trade through the virtual consultation meetings which were held in June-July 2020 period.

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 Trade facilitation can be characterized as the simplification of procedures in international trade operations. It includes harmonization and standardization of trade procedures, reducing costs, increasing competitiveness in trade, and ensuring that international trade operations are undertaken efficiently and transparently. Furthermore, trade facilitation mechanisms are very instrumental in fostering the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in consultation processes. In this regard, National Trade Facilitation Bodies (NTFBs) have key importance in designing and implementing trade facilitation measures. They provide a conducive platform for the public and private sectors, and all other stakeholders in the trade community to discuss the challenges in trade and develop solutions at the national level.

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

Within this framework, the TWG has convened virtually on September 22nd, 2020, with the theme of “*Guidelines for Establishing Effective National Trade Facilitation Bodies in the OIC Countries*”. During the Meeting, the participants deliberated on the global practices and trends as well as how to better make use of national trade facilitation bodies and the status of the OIC Member Countries in this regard.

The Handbook produced by the COMCEC Coordination Office on this subject reveals that a well-designed organizational framework, effective communication among the stakeholders, and adoption of modern management techniques are some of the major issues for the success of NTFBs. On the other hand, NTFBs may face some challenges such as lack of strong political ownership overtime, irregular participation of the nominated members, poor performance management, and inadequate human capital. As highlighted in the Handbook, the organizational structure of a successful NTFB in a country may not function properly in a different country. Hence, there is no one single model that fits all to make an NTFB effective and successful. In this respect, the guiding principles and recommended practices identified in the Handbook provide a wide range of options for our member countries to utilize in accordance with their national context.

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

Furthermore, the COMCEC Trade Working Group held an ad-hoc Consultative Meeting on July 13th, 2020, with the theme of “The impacts of COVID-19 on Trade and the Way Forward in the OIC Member Countries.” In this framework, the Working Group discussed the current and potential future impacts of the pandemic on economy and trade in the OIC region as well as the trade facilitation policies, exchanged expertise and good practices among the member countries, and deliberated on the cooperation opportunities based on the needs and experiences of the member countries.

The participants, after intense deliberations, highlighted the following areas/subjects:

- Designing/ strengthening mechanisms for supporting and financing SMEs for a healthy recovery during the crisis,
- Helping the digitalization of trade companies especially SMEs both in terms of improving their digital infrastructure and enhancing their access to online trading platforms.
- Supporting digitalization and touchless trade by using electronic technologies in the customs services during the pandemic,
- Easing the accessibility of medical products and facilitating their trade among the Member Countries,
- Ensuring the public and private sector dialogue and cooperation in trade facilitation during the crisis times,
- Strengthening the fragile structure of the OIC Countries in responding crisis like a pandemic,
- Sharing experience regarding pre-shipment security measures,
- Increasing the dialogue and cooperation among the border agencies of neighboring countries by regional and multilateral arrangements in order to provide seamless cross border trade during the crisis,
- Providing mechanisms and arrangements in order to secure the logistical connectivity in the global supply chain during the crisis,

- Establishing an information platform among the member countries for facilitating the follow-up of the updates in their trade policies,
- Providing a platform for publishing the COVID-19 action plans/programs of the Member Countries in order to facilitate experience sharing,
- Providing sustainability of the domestic and international investment flow during the pandemic time,
- Providing technical support regarding the customs services and other trade policies to the Member Countries in need,
- Raising awareness on the support programs and projects of the international organizations related to trade and investment,
- Enhancing the effectiveness of National Trade Facilitation Bodies in Member Countries to better cope better with the pandemic.

All the documents and presentations made during the above-mentioned Working Groups Meetings are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

Transport and communications infrastructure is a critical component of the 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 recent years, increasing population and budget constraints accompanied by the growing demand for transport services necessitated new methods for the effective management of the transport infrastructure. In this respect, the pricing of transport infrastructure is one of the emerging methods that can be an important source of finance for governments and an effective tool for traffic demand management as well as reducing negative externalities such as environmental problems. Furthermore, the pricing of transport infrastructure is particularly important for increasing the quality of national transport infrastructure and transport services for the benefit of the community. Pricing is also a sensitive area whereby optimization is required commensurate with the economic realities of countries and income levels of their people.

Considering its importance, COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) held its 15th meeting virtually on July 7th, 2020, with the theme of “Pricing of Transport Infrastructure in the OIC Member Countries”. During the meeting, the representatives of the Member States discussed and shared their views and experiences on how to enhance the implementations with respect to the pricing of transport infrastructure in the OIC Member States. Moreover, they discussed global trends and best practices in the world in order to draw concrete lessons from them.

The research report prepared for the meeting provides a conceptual framework on the pricing of transport infrastructure, the global trends and current practices, and concrete policy recommendations for improving the implementations with respect to the pricing of transport infrastructure in the OIC member countries. The Report includes six case studies including

three field visits (Indonesia, Nigeria, and Tunisia) and three desk-based research (Singapore, South Africa, and the United Kingdom²).

In this framework, the report highlights the major challenges faced by the OIC member countries with respect to the transport infrastructure pricing as; unclear or unavailable national legal framework, poor governance systems, limited institutional and human capacity, and lack of necessary guidelines on the content of pricing of transport infrastructure.

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

- Developing contemporary transport infrastructure pricing policies and making use of implementation instruments such as PPPs, where possible, and public transport operations for a well-functioning transport system.
- Assigning an autonomous operator (entity/institution/body) for the effective collection of charges and allocation of funds arising from transport infrastructure pricing services.
- Utilizing transport infrastructure pricing tools (i.e. tolls, levies, vehicle tax, fuel tax, mileage tax, etc.) to effectively manage transport demand as well as to raise funds for transport infrastructure development.
- Utilizing contemporary collection (i.e. automated electronic tolls, on-board-units, and Global Navigation Satellite System) and enforcement systems for ensuring effective transport infrastructure pricing.

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

3.1.3. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Tourism has attained special importance for the OIC member countries. The COMCEC Tourism Working Group has held several meetings on various aspects of the tourism sector and its sub-categories. Medical tourism is one of the emerging areas of tourism that can be defined as the process of traveling outside the country of residence for the purpose of receiving medical care. The growing popularity of medical tourism has captured the attention of policy-makers, researchers, service providers, and the media. Medical tourism represents a worldwide multibillion-dollar phenomenon that is expected to grow considerably in the next decade. In this respect, the medical tourism market was valued at 95.8 billion US dollars in 2018 and it is projected to reach 165.3 billion US dollars by 2023. To provide a general outlook, the medical tourism market is projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14 to 15 percent in terms of market size. The average number of patients received is expected to increase at a rate of 8 to 10 percent annually during the 2017-2023 period. Medical tourism globally has become a billion-dollar industry in relation to the increasing number of people who travel to other countries to get healthcare services. Today, millions of people travel abroad for medical purposes. Various factors such as cost-effectiveness, better quality in services, less waiting time, availability of treatments, alternative therapies, and natural endowments play a role in their decision to receive medical treatment away from the home country.

² COMCEC Coordination Office, Pricing of Transport Infrastructure in the OIC Member Countries, 2020.

Given the importance of the issue, the COMCEC Tourism WG, in its 15th Meeting on September 24th, 2020, elaborated on medical tourism through discussing the trends in the World and OIC, identifying the main challenges, exchanging experiences and good practices, and deliberating on the policy options for improving the medical tourism in the member countries. Within the framework of the research report conducted for the meeting, field visits were conducted to Turkey, Jordan, and Germany as the OIC Member Countries' practices and international practices. On the other hand, desk-based studies were fulfilled for Azerbaijan, Malaysia, USA, and India. According to the above-mentioned Report, the top ten medical tourism destinations in the World are Japan, Korea, the US, Taiwan, Germany, Singapore, Malaysia, Sweden, Thailand, and India. Whereas, Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan are the leading countries in the OIC region.

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

- Inadequate health infrastructure Poor service quality,
- Limited institutional and human capacity,
- Restrictive visa procedures,
- Insufficient incentive schemes.

After intense deliberations, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Encouraging marketing and branding activities in order to boost the image of the destination country with a view to attracting international patients
- Using online platforms for customized marketing strategies towards target groups
- Promoting development/implementation of exchange programs among the OIC Member Countries for medical personnel in order to boost knowledge and experience sharing
- Encouraging bilateral or regional/multilateral arrangements (such as patient exchange programs, pre-diagnosis services, alliances between healthcare providers and streamlining health insurance schemes, etc.) between public/private stakeholders including insurances and hospitals in order to sustain the exchange of patients.
- Establishing a database on health tourism for the use of OIC member countries for further cooperation in terms of patient-treatment exchange and capacity building in healthcare provision

In line with the relevant resolution of the 35. COMCEC Ministerial Session, the 15th meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group, in its second day, considered the preparations for the Ministerial Exchange of Views Sessions of the 36th COMCEC Meeting to be held with the theme of "Promoting Entrepreneurship for Tourism Industry Competitiveness".

Within this framework, the 15th Meeting of TWG has come up with a set of policy recommendations under the following headings for the Ministerial Exchange of Views Sessions of the 36th COMCEC Meeting:

- Public Investments and Infra-structure
- Capacity Building, Certification, and Training
- Financing & Subsidization

- Legislative Actions
- Risk Management
- Sustainability
- Intra-OIC Collaboration

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

Furthermore, the tourism sector, by its very nature, has been affected most severely by the pandemic. It is considered one of the hardest-hit sectors by the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the international tourist arrivals would decrease by 20 percent to 30 percent in 2020 as compared to 2019. This is equivalent to a loss of 300 to 450 billion USD in international tourism receipts.

In this framework, the COMCEC Tourism Working Group conducted a Virtual Consultative Meeting on July 9th, 2020, and elaborated on the existing and potential impacts of COVID nineteen (COVID 19) on the Tourism sector in the OIC member countries. The Working Group also explored the capacity building and experience sharing opportunities among our Member Countries.

The participants highlighted the following areas/subjects:

- Strategic risk and crisis management in tourism,
- Regional online training on digital marketing and promotion,
- Tourism marketing and promotion,
- Promoting cooperation in the area of tourism statistics,
- Training on tourism product diversification,
- Revitalization of the medical tourism sector in the OIC Member States,
- Establishing a tourism exchange platform (i.e online tourism exhibition)
- Encouraging bilateral border arrangements in the tourism sector between OIC Member Countries.
- Encouraging the utilization of modern technologies (e.g. self-service systems, robots) in tourism service provision for curbing the spread of COVID-19 virus.
- Developing safe and clean destination brands in the OIC region.
- Redesigning tourism products and processes amid Covid-19 and future epidemics

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

3.1.4. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group

Good governance at all levels - global, regional, and particularly national- is a primary necessity for the progress in the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition. Policy and legal framework, coherence and coordination, implementation and enforcement, and information, monitoring, and evaluation are the key aspects of good food security governance. Furthermore, principles such as transparency, effectiveness, accountability, and collective action are inextricable parts of good governance for ensuring food security and nutrition. Therefore, governments naturally have a leading role in ensuring good governance with an inclusive approach. In this respect, the 15th Meeting of the Agriculture Working Groups was held on September 17th, 2020 in a virtual-only format with the theme “*Good Governance for Ensuring*

Food Security and Nutrition in the OIC Member Countries” and a research report prepared on the same subject was considered by the Working Group.

The said report presents the food security governance performance of the OIC Member Countries based on four levels of good governance: (i) Policy and Legal Framework, (ii) Coordination and Coherence, (iii) Implementation, and (iv) Information-Monitoring-Evaluation. The Research Report also reveals that many countries suffering from food insecurity and malnutrition problems in the OIC have governance gaps in coordination and monitoring mechanisms. Besides, several countries have governance gaps in terms of integration of food security and nutrition targets with their national development plans.

Within the framework of the research report, field visits were conducted in Indonesia, Côte d’Ivoire, and Palestine, and Brazil was subject to the desk-based study.

The research report identifies the following challenges, among others, in terms of food security governance in the Member Countries.

- Incomplete legislative steps;
- Lack of explicit, mandated plans;
- Limited monitoring mechanisms;
- Over-fragmentation of the government work;
- Infrastructure problems at the sub-national level.

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

- Developing a comprehensive national food security and nutrition strategy and/or strengthening the existing food security policies and strategies to extend their reach and inclusiveness so that everyone can reap the benefits, including the poorest and the most vulnerable to achieve food security and nutrition for all.
- Establishing a high-level national coordination mechanism (i.e. an inter-ministerial or presidential council) for ensuring a healthy and sustainable multi-stakeholder dialogue for the effective coordination of all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the processes of policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring; and endowing it with significant execution power and sufficient human and financial resources.
- Improving the coordination and coherence of policy actions on food security and nutrition in turbulent times (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic) at all levels ranging from sub-national to national; national to bilateral or multilateral; sub-regional to regional, and finally, from OIC-level to global level.
- Designing a detailed and transparent implementation plan for the national and sub-national tasks and equipping the fieldwork personnel with relevant know-how and allocating sufficient financial resources to each and every step of the implementation process.
- Establishing an online platform/food information system (e.g. vulnerability atlas, food security fora) that ideally transmits real-time information on monitoring food security and nutrition governance with a view to generating credible data and statistics and formulating evidence-based policies.

- Promoting capacity building and knowledge/experience sharing among the OIC Member Countries in the four levels of good governance of food security and nutrition (i.e. (i) Policy and Legal Framework (ii) Coordination and Coherence (iii) Implementation, and (iv) Information-Monitoring-Evaluation.)

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

Moreover, the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group held virtually a Consultative Meeting with the theme of “The Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Security and Agriculture in the OIC Member Countries” on 30th June 2020. The Working Group discussed the current and potential future impacts of the pandemic on food security and agricultural policies, exchanged expertise and good practices and deliberated on the cooperation opportunities based on the needs and experiences of our member countries.

Within this framework, the participants highlighted some ideas/policy options for future cooperation initiatives.

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

3.1.5. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

Recent forecasts suggest that the share of the world population living in urban areas may increase to around 70 percent and the size of the urban population is expected to reach 7 billion as of the early 2050s. Most of the projected increase in urban population is expected to take place in Africa and Asia, which suggests that the OIC member countries will be particularly exposed to the projected urbanization process. The new challenges such as the devastating consequences of the pandemic disease (COVID-19) and the rapid increase in refugee populations living in urban areas will exacerbate the urban poverty risks in the Member Countries.

Given the importance of the issue, the 15th Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group was held on September 29th, 2020 in a virtual-only format, with the theme “*Urban Poverty in the OIC Member Countries*”.

A research report on the subject conducted for the above-mentioned Meeting reviews the global trends in urban poverty, highlights the main data gaps and related statistical issues and identifies the current and future urban poverty challenges for the member countries.

The report highlights that the OIC Member Countries, especially those in Africa and Asia, have experienced a strong urbanization trend, which is expected to continue further in the coming decades. The report reveals that high population density in slums reduces the capacity of public policy to effectively intervene in and respond to emergencies, develop efficient long-term strategies for urban poverty reduction, and improve the living standards of the people living in urban areas.

The following challenges were identified by the Working Group:

- High rates of the population living in slums,
- High rates of informal employment,
- Lower employment levels for disadvantaged groups,
- The high number of refugees and other forced migrants,

- Limited access to health services and hygienic material and water,
- Lack of reliable data on urban poverty.

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

- Developing comprehensive and effective urban planning strategies that particularly focus on better management of slums to prevent uncontrolled growth of existing slums and formation of new ones, and improving the access of slum dwellers to basic services such as education and health services through strategic investments.
- Designing effective local labor market policies that would help to tackle the informality problem and create more and better jobs.
- Activating the Islamic Social Finance Tools and systematically integrating them into the general urban poverty policy toolbox.
- Improving urban governance capacity and strengthening resilience to shocks (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic).
- Conceptualizing urban poverty and developing/improving data collection and measurement practices to achieve evidence-based policymaking.

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

3.1.6. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group

Shariah governance is the foundation for the practice of Islamic finance through the observance of the tenets, conditions, and principles espoused by Shariah. A robust shariah governance regime is of particular importance for ensuring compliance with Shariah principles and the confidence of customers as well as the financial markets on the credibility of Islamic finance operations.

Given the importance of shariah governance framework in Islamic finance, the 14th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) was held on September 15th, 2020, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “*Improving Shariah Governance Framework in Islamic Finance*”.

According to a research report conducted on the subject, the OIC Region has not been strongly engaged with the Shariah governance framework in Islamic finance. The majority of the member countries (thirty-one member countries) can be placed under the category of the unregulated regime in which there is no national Shariah Supervisory Board. Furthermore, in nine member countries, Islamic finance regulations, institutions, and practices do not exist.

Moreover, in order to enrich the data and analysis in the research report and to get insights about the policy environment on improving the shariah governance framework in Islamic finance, field visits (the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia) and desk-based studies (Malaysia, Nigeria, and Turkey) were conducted.

The research report highlights the followings as the major challenges of the member countries that negatively affect the improvement of the Shariah Governance Framework in Islamic Finance:

- Limited qualified human resources,
- Lack of adequate knowledge-based institutions,
- Differences between the supervision of different regulatory bodies on financial institutions' tasks,
- Lack of integration of Shariah governance considerations,
- Lack of awareness in society,
- Inadequate communication between Shariah councils.

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

- Developing a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for the Shariah Governance processes and arrangements to ensure that all the operations and business activities in Islamic Finance are in accordance with Shariah.
- Encouraging the establishment of national Shariah Supervisory Boards (SSBs) supervising the institutional SSBs.
- Developing guidelines for ensuring/facilitating the active involvement of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in IFIs' management in accordance with their contribution to the investment pool.
- Encouraging talent development through training and professional certification programs and increasing the awareness of stakeholders about Shariah Governance.
- Promoting the integration of the Islamic Finance sector into the whole economy with a view to making monetary policy more inclusive.

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

3.2.The COMCEC Project Funding

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

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

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

In 2019, 22 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, 35 countries in 2019 have reaped the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding.

Moreover, under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. These projects, however, are yet to be completed due to delays arising from international travel restrictions imposed by COVID 19 pandemic. Hence, some of the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021. Table 1 below shows the List of Projects that are financed by the COMCEC Coordination Office under 7th implementation period of the CPF.

Table 1: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding under 7th Implementation Period

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Benin	Niger, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire	Agriculture	Enhancing Capacity for Warehousing and Storage of Cereals and Cowpeas (to be implemented in 2021)
2	Niger	Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Cereals and Cowpeas (to be implemented in 2021)
3	Suriname	Indonesia and Turkey	Agriculture	Capacity Building on Irrigation Systems in Vegetable Crops (to be implemented in 2021)
4	COMSTECH	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey	Agriculture	New Breeding Technologies for Food and Nutritional Security (to be implemented in 2021)
5	SESRIC	Bangladesh, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Suriname, Turkey and Uganda	Agriculture	Enhancing Food Security through National Food Balance Sheets (to be implemented in 2021)
6	Brunei Darussalam	Indonesia and Malaysia	Finance	Capacity Building Program on Sukuk, ESG Sukuk and Islamic Fintech (to be implemented in 2021)
7	Malaysia	Turkey, Brunei Darussalam	Finance	Advancing Islamic Capital Market through Financial Technology (to be implemented in 2021)
8	Nigeria	Sudan, Mozambique	Finance	Improving Takaful in the OIC Member States
9	Sierra Leone	Malaysia and Nigeria	Finance	Facilitating Women Entrepreneurs' Access to Islamic Finance (to be implemented in 2021)
10	Benin	The Gambia, Niger and Turkey	Poverty Alleviation	TVET Piloting in the Selected OIC Countries (to be implemented in 2021)
11	The Gambia	Sierra Leone and Nigeria	Poverty Alleviation	Infusing Entrepreneurship Education in School Curricula (to be implemented in 2021)
12	Turkey	Sudan, Somalia, Niger	Poverty Alleviation	Strengthening Health Human Capacity and Creating Intervention Task Force (to be implemented in 2021)
13	Maldives	Turkey, Malaysia	Trade	Improve Food Import-Export Control System (to be implemented in 2021)
14	Sudan	Chad, Egypt, Tunisia	Trade	Efficient Border Management through One Stop Border Post
15	ICCIA	25 Member Countries	Trade	Digital Transformation for Enhancing Trade Facilitation (to be implemented in 2021)

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
16	SMIIC	Turkey, Morocco, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Djibouti, Senegal	Trade	OIC/SMIIC Halal Foundation Training for Africa Region (to be implemented in 2021)
17	Cameroon	Côte d'Ivoire and Chad	Transport and Communications	Establishing Maritime Transport Archives (to be implemented in 2021)
18	Nigeria	Benin, Togo and the Gambia	Transport and Communications	Monitoring Lagos-Abidjan Transport Corridor
19	Turkey	Algeria and Tunisia	Transport and Communications	Implementation of International Maritime Conventions (to be implemented in 2021)
20	Cameroon	Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal	Tourism	Capacity Building of Destination Management Organizations Stakeholders (to be implemented in 2021)
21	Turkey	Afghanistan and Iran	Tourism	Revitalizing Mevlana's Travel Route (to be implemented in 2021)
22	Uganda	The Gambia, Malaysia, Mozambique, and Nigeria	Tourism	Community-Based Tourism through the Promotion of Heritage Sites (to be implemented in 2021)

Furthermore, several online training sessions regarding COMCEC Project Funding have been held on a weekly basis between June 10th and July 8th. Sessions informed project staff on responsible actors, implementation, monitoring, visibility rules as well as project management information system.

On the other hand, the CCO has made the 8th Call on September 1st, 2020. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC website. (project.comcec.org)

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

With a view to address the existing and potential ramifications of the COVID Pandemic, the CCO has decided to initiate the COMCEC COVID Response (CCR) for the benefit of member country public institutions. The CCR is mainly about alleviating the negative impact of the pandemic on member country economies with a particular focus on agriculture, trade and tourism sectors in the pilot phase. Under the Program, the CCO will finance certain types of projects, which would focus on needs assessment, sharing expertise, providing direct grants to final beneficiaries and matching inventors with investors. CCO will call for project proposal to be financed under new CCR Program in 2021 by mid-October 2020.

Secondly, considering the current situation and special conditions in Palestine, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds, the CCO has initiated the Al-Quds Program, which focuses on destination development and management as well as community based tourism in Al-Quds. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine, the program consists of several projects to be carried out between 2020 and 2022.

The first two projects have been initiated in 2020. Under the first project titled “*Analyzing the Tourism Infrastructure and Developing a Tourism Destination Road Map for Al-Quds*”, the CCO has been conducting a research study for analyzing the tourism infrastructure and developing a tourism destination roadmap for Al Quds. Within the framework of this research

study, the current situation of the tourism infrastructure in Al-Quds (hotels, restaurants, transportation, human resources, guides, tour operators, etc.) will be assessed, the most urgent areas that need investment will be determined as well as the cultural assets and facilities that could be included in the tourism offering of Al-Quds will be analysed. The project also contains assessment of the number and capacity of tourism facilities and workers in Al-Quds, the need for training of sector professionals and craftsmen. The Project will ultimately provide a SWOT analysis and mission, vision and objective for a tourism destination and communication strategy for Al-Quds.

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

Both projects are expected to be finalized by the end of 2020. Remaining projects are planned to be implemented between 2021 and 2022.

3.3. Follow-Up the COMCEC Policy Recommendations: Efforts of Member Countries to Implement Policy Recommendations Adopted by 35th COMCEC Session.

Continued efforts to pursue the state of implementation of the COMCEC policy recommendations and to identify the progress and performance at the national level necessitate a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism under COMCEC. For this purpose, COMCEC has launched the COMCEC Policy Follow-Up System (PFS) in July 2019, to assess the results of the implementation of the COMCEC policy recommendations adopted in the COMCEC Ministerial Sessions.

As an electronic-based platform, COMCEC PFS aims to facilitate the effective follow-up of the implementation of the policy recommendations (PRs) in the Member Countries. COMCEC PFS has designed based on the Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation Approach, which focuses on the outcomes and impacts more than the process. Besides, COMCEC PFS enables CCO to collect, manage, analyze, and report synchronized data and information to the relevant COMCEC for as well as to assist CCO to extract relevant information for future planning.

Furthermore, COMCEC PFS is expected to ensure strengthening member states' involvement and their ownership by a regular and reliable reporting and effective implementation of the COMCEC policy recommendations.

So far, with respect to the policy recommendations adopted by the 35th Session of the COMCEC, only 6 member countries have communicated their responses to the System in five cooperation areas, namely Trade (2 Countries), Transport and Communications (2), Agriculture (1), Poverty Alleviation (2) and Finance (1). The details related to the feedbacks of the concerned member countries are given below under each cooperation area.

a. Trade Cooperation

Indonesia

Concerning the policy recommendations related to 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: Indonesia has reported that it has already a strategy/action plan/ road map for this aim and is ready to provide technical assistance to the other requesting member countries through workshops.

Besides the establishment of a formal consultation mechanism, Indonesia also reported that it has already a strategy, action plan, and road map concerning the development of an effective Advance Ruling System, promotion of integrated Single Windows (SW) Systems, and Trade Information Portals.

Concerning the policy recommendation related to border management, Indonesia has completed its strategy, action plan, and road map as well as the related regulation, law, and administrative measures with a view to implementing this policy recommendation. Furthermore, Indonesia reported that it can provide technical assistance to the other requesting member countries on the subject.

Jordan

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the establishment of a formal consultation mechanism between regulatory authorities and the trade community towards ensuring an efficient trade environment for the interest of various stakeholders at the national level, Jordan reported that it has already a strategy/action plan/ road map for this purpose. Jordan also reported that it has ongoing efforts for utilizing information and communications technologies effectively for the dissemination of trade and the development of an effective Advance Ruling System in order to enhance the certainty and predictability of customs operations.

Moreover, Jordan considers having a strategy/ action plan/ road map to promote an integrated Single Windows (SW) Systems and Trade Information Portals. In addition, there is an ongoing process of issuing a regulation/law/ administrative measure for this purpose.

Jordan completed the required strategy, action plan, and road map with the aim of establishing an efficient electronic exchange of information systems among all relevant agencies, particularly among neighboring countries. Although a regulation/law/ administrative measure does not exist on this issue, Jordan conducts several training activities towards implementing the concerned policy recommendation.

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the simplification of the formalities and documentary requirements for facilitating transit operations, there is an ongoing process to have a strategy/ action plan/ road map. Activities like trainings, workshops and conferences are conducted for this purpose in Jordan.

b. Transport and Communications

Jordan

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the improvement of risk management in transport PPP projects in Islamic Countries, Jordan reported that it has already a strategy/action plan/ road map for developing the legal framework through adopting PPP tailored legislation. In this respect, Jordan expresses its readiness to provide technical assistance to the other requesting member countries through workshops.

Besides, Jordan already has a PPP unit, which facilitates allocating responsibilities for the management of PPPs. Jordan has also a conducive administrative environment for supporting the use of appropriate technical tools, analyses, etc., and development of a strong database and competences for minimizing risks during the implementation of the PPP projects. Furthermore, Jordan has risk management guidelines and checklists for the betterment of the implementation of the PPP projects.

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the improvement transport project appraisals in the OIC member countries, Jordan has reported that it has ongoing efforts to complete a strategy/ action plan/ road map, which aims at designing a systematic framework for transport project appraisals, indicating the objectives, types and the utilized methodologies.

Jordan has also ongoing efforts to complete a strategy/ action plan/ road map with respect to developing manuals and guidelines for ensuring effective and harmonized transport project appraisals. In this respect, it was indicated that Jordan needs technical assistance through training programs.

Turkey

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the improvement of risk management in transport PPP projects in Islamic Countries, Turkey reported that it has already a strategy, action plan, and road map for the development of the legal framework through adopting PPP tailored legislation. In this respect, Turkey is willing to provide technical assistance to the other requesting member countries through study visits.

Furthermore, Turkey has specific units/departments under the Ministry of the Transport and Infrastructure and Directorate Generals of Highways, which facilitate allocating responsibilities for the management of PPPs over the course of their life-cycle. Limited institutional and human capacity and technical expertise as well as the Covid-19 Pandemic have been considered as the main challenges for the development of risk management guidelines and checklists for the betterment of the implementation of the PPP projects.

Concerning the policy recommendations related to the improvement transport project appraisals in the OIC member countries, Turkey has responded that it has already a systematic framework for transport project appraisals, indicating the objectives, types, and the utilized methodologies. In addition, Turkey has manuals and guidelines for ensuring effective and harmonized transport project appraisals as well as effectively implementing the existing ones.

c. Agriculture

Malaysia

Regarding the policy recommendation related to enhancing the capacity in the collection, management, and dissemination of agricultural trade data, Malaysia indicated that it has already an ongoing effort to develop a policy document together with the relevant regulatory and administrative preparations on the issue.

d. Financial Cooperation

Iran

Iran reported that it is developing a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for the Takaful industry to facilitate the operations, transparency, and governance in this sector.

Besides, in pursuant to the 34th COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations, Iran has conducted several activities such as workshops, training, and seminar for improving capacity and human capital for increasing the use of Islamic finance for infrastructure financing.

e. Poverty Alleviation

Iran

With regard to the policy recommendations about access to health services, it was reported that Iran is ready to provide technical assistance through seminar, training program, and/or workshop to the other requesting member countries for developing a strategy/policy including a well-designed payment and health insurance schemes to achieve universal health coverage.

Concerning child and maternal mortality, it was stated that Iran can benefit from technical assistance opportunities in the format of training programs, workshops, or seminars to develop a strategy/policy to improve access to maternal, neonatal, and child health (MNCH) care, and to provide equitable distribution of health providers. Iran also expressed that it is ready to cooperate with the countries on the issues linked to access to maternal, neonatal, and child health services through the exchange of expert programs.

Iran also expressed its readiness to provide technical assistance with workshops and exchange of expert programs to improve health system functioning through training and practice of recommended standard of care protocols, and regular monitoring of standards.

With respect to developing/improving integrated health information management systems and developing sustainable educational programs on women and child health care, Iran expressed its willingness for providing technical assistance to the other requesting member countries.

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

The relevant OIC Institutions are also undertaking programs, projects, and activities that serve the objectives of the Strategy. Some of the projects and activities held since the 35th Session of the COMCEC are provided below.

- TPS-OIC is the most important project of the COMCEC in the field of trade. The System will not only facilitate increasing the intra-OIC trade but also build a framework for cooperation among the OIC Member Countries. Thus, it will be a basis for further cooperation among the member countries. In this regard, the 35th Session of the COMCEC requested the concerned Member States to expedite their efforts for the submission of the concession lists to the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Secretariat in the standard format circulated by the TNC Secretariat for the operationalization of the TPSOIC at the earliest. For accelerating the process, the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Turkey, Chairman of the 1st and 2nd Rounds of TNC Meetings, requested TNC Secretariat to organize a Virtual Consultative Meeting for discussing issues regarding the Implementation of the TPS-OIC with the attendance of the Participating States, which have ratified the TPS-OIC Agreements and submitted their concession lists. The COMCEC Coordination Office, in consultation with the Host Country and the ICDT (as the co-Secretariat of the TNC), has announced that the said Virtual Consultative Meeting will be held virtually on October 27th, 2020.
- Furthermore, during the 13th Islamic Summit held on 10-15 April 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, H.E. Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN, the President of the Republic of Turkey and the Chairman of the COMCEC proposed to set-up an OIC Arbitration Center in İstanbul

for the benefit of the Member Countries. Upon this proposal, the COMCEC has put this important initiative on its agenda. The 35th General Assembly Meeting of the ICCIA has approved the Statute of the Center. The Headquarter Agreement of the Center has been signed during the 35th COMCEC Session. ICCIA and TOBB are undertaking the final preparations for making the Center operational soon.

- The Forums operating in the field of financial cooperation under the COMCEC provide regular cooperation platforms for the relevant authorities of the Member Countries. In this respect, the OIC Member States Stock Exchanges Forum has been working towards enhancing cooperation among the stock exchanges of the OIC Member Countries and relevant institutions. The Forum has also developed some important projects including S&P OIC/COMCEC 50 Shariah Index. Furthermore, the Forum has been working on the establishment of a gold exchange/platform for the OIC Member Countries. The 14th Meeting of the Forum will be held on October 8th in 2020. Details regarding the Forum activities are available on the Forum website. (www.oicexchanges.org)
- The COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum provides a regular cooperation mechanism for capital markets regulatory bodies of the Member States. Along with its regular activities, the Forum has also been exerting efforts to realize the “COMCEC Real Estate Initiative” in light of the relevant resolutions of the COMCEC. The 9th Meeting of the Forum will be organized on October 13th-14th, in 2020.
- The OIC-COMCEC Central Banks Forum facilitates sharing experiences among the relevant authorities of the member countries and enhancing institutional and human capacity in this field. The 2nd Meeting of the Forum will be organized as a virtual-only format, on October 8th, in 2020.
- Islamic Trade Fairs are organized for increasing intra-OIC trade and promoting the products, industries, and services of the OIC member countries. In addition to the Islamic Trade Fairs, sector-specific fairs and exhibitions are also organized by the Member Countries in cooperation with ICDT.
- Since the 35th Session of the COMCEC, SESRIC has continued its activities towards strengthening and improving the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) in the OIC Member States with a view to producing better national statistics and thus helping policy-makers introduce better national policies and strategies. In this context, the Centre contributes to the technical capacity building of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and other constituents of the NSSs of the OIC Member States in its capacity as the Secretariat of OIC Statistical Commission (OIC-StatCom) and through its Statistical Capacity Building (StatCaB) Programme.
- SESRIC has also made efforts to strengthen intra-OIC South-South cooperation, by implementing a wide range of capacity building programs and training activities on various socio-economic fields of immediate interest to the OIC Member States. Since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), the Centre has conducted most of its planned activities in 2020 through newly adopted distance learning IT modalities in order to respond to this extraordinary situation.
- Furthermore, during the period under review, SESRIC signed 4 agreements with the relevant national, regional, international, and OIC institutions in order to strengthen its ties with its partners for a better implementation of COMCEC Strategy and Ministerial Policy Recommendations

- Moreover, SMIIC has continued to work on the development of the much-needed common standards in the OIC including the OIC/SMIIC Halal Tourism Standard, which was published in December 2019. SMIIC has conducted 6 training programs on the OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards in order to aid the common use of standards within the OIC.
- The World Halal Summit (WHS) 2019, a prestigious halal event in the world gathering prominent speakers and important stakeholders of the halal industry and was held simultaneously with the 7th OIC Halal Expo on 28 November-01 December 2019 in Istanbul, under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. World Halal Summit was co-organized by SMIIC, The Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT), and Discovery Events under the theme of “Halal for All Generations: Importance of Family and Youth”.
- 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, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, which serves as the Secretariat of the Forum. The 8th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum will be held virtually in the last quarter of 2020, with the theme of “Al Quds as a Special Destination”.

5. 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 35th Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings and three Consultative Meetings on the impacts of COVID -19 have been held virtually. 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.

Within the implementation of the COMCEC Project Funding, in 2019, 22 projects have been implemented successfully by the Member Countries and OIC Institutions. Through these projects, 35 member countries benefited from the COMCEC Project Funding. Moreover, under the 7th Call for Project Proposals, 22 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2020. These projects, however, are yet to be completed due to delays arising from international travel restrictions imposed by COVID 19 pandemic. Hence, some of the projects are expected to be finalized in 2021. On the other hand, the CCO has made the 8th Call on September 1st, 2020. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC website.