



REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

PROGRESS REPORT

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMCEC STRATEGY

1. Introduction:

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

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

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

COMCEC Working Groups are held in the six cooperation areas defined by the COMCEC Strategy, namely trade, transport and communications, tourism, agriculture, finance, and poverty alleviation. Since the 37th Session of the COMCEC, six Working Group Meetings were held. All the documents regarding the working group meetings are available on the COMCEC website in e-book format (<http://ebook.comcec.org/>).

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

The Member States and OIC Institutions have shown great interest to the COMCEC Financial Support Instruments. Under the 9th Call for Project Proposals under the COMCEC Project Funding, 17 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2022. Moreover, under the COMCEC COVID Response (CCR) Program, which aims at assisting member countries with a view to address existing and potential future ramifications of the pandemic, 7 projects of the Member Countries have been selected to be financed under the 2nd Call.

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 initiated the Al-Quds Program in 2020 with an aim of emphasizing the importance of Al-Quds as well as its Palestinian-Arab identity in a systematic way. Two projects were already completed in 2020. In 2021-2022 implementation period, 5 projects are being implemented covering the areas of tourism promotion, cultural heritage, community resilience, online reservation and food tourism.

This report summarizes the progress achieved since the 37th Session of the COMCEC towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.

2. Resolutions of the 37th Session of the COMCEC on the Implementation of the Strategy

The 37th Session of the COMCEC was held on 24-25 November 2021 in İstanbul. 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 37th Session of the COMCEC adopted the following resolutions, among others, for ensuring the effective implementation of the COMCEC Strategy:

- The Session welcomed the Progress Report submitted by the CCO highlighting the progress achieved in the implementation of the Strategy; commended the Member Countries and the OIC Institutions for their valuable contributions to its implementation and requested the Member States and the OIC Institutions to further their full support to the implementation of the Strategy.
- The Session requested the CCO to regularly report the progress in the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy to the COMCEC Sessions, the Follow-up Committee Meetings, and other relevant OIC fora.
- The Session welcomed the successful convening of the COMCEC Working Groups in the cooperation areas in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the 36th Session of the COMCEC and also welcomed the research studies and sectoral outlooks conducted and prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office specifically for enriching the discussions in each COMCEC Working Group Meeting.
- The Session commended the efforts of the Working Groups towards approximating policies among the Member States in their fields of competence and welcomed the policy recommendations made by the Working Groups in their meetings held in 2021.
- The Session called upon the relevant Member States to utilize COMCEC Policy Follow-up System, which has been established by the COMCEC Coordination Office for the effective follow-up of the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- Commending the efforts of the Member States and the OIC Institutions for the realization of COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations, the Session invited all the Member States to exert every effort, to the extent possible, to implement the Policy Recommendations and requested the OIC Institutions to support the Member States to this end through capacity development and training programmes for implementation of policy recommendations.

- The Session also commended the OIC Institutions' efforts in helping the member countries in their efforts towards mitigating the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, among others, "the COMCEC COVID-19 Response Program" launched by the CCO; publication titled "Socio-Economic Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic in OIC Member Countries," and various training and capacity building programs conducted by SESRIC; "Strategic Preparedness and Response Program for the COVID-19 Pandemic" initiated by the IsDB Group; the webinars on the impact of Covid-19 on intra-OIC trade and investment flows organized by the ICDT in collaboration with OIC and International Institutions; various trade finance and trade activities (financing support for the purchase of medical supplies, food staples and SMEs, webinars, support for equipment and capacity development, harmonization of standards, etc.) undertaken by ITFC to assist Member Countries' fight against COVID-19 pandemic and information sharing activities of the ICCIA to counter the COVID-19 crisis at both the Governmental as well as the Private Sector levels.
- Expressed its appreciation to the SESRIC for the activities, particularly capacity building and training programmes, contributing to the implementation of the COMCEC Ministerial Policy Recommendations in the six cooperation areas of the COMCEC Strategy.
- Commending the valuable outcomes of projects previously financed by COMCEC since 2014, the Session invited Member Countries to intensify their efforts to harness the benefits of COMCEC Project Funding particularly with a view to materialize the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.
- The Session welcomed the initiation of twenty-five projects being implemented in 2021 and welcomed the 9th Call for Project Proposals made by the COMCEC Coordination Office in September 2021 within the framework of COMCEC Project Funding and the 2nd Call of Project Proposals under the COMCEC COVID Response in October 2021.
- The Session called on the COMCEC National and Working Group Focal points to work more closely with the COMCEC Coordination Office for effective coordination and communication.
- The Session invited the Member States to ensure the participation of the COMCEC National Focal Points and COMCEC Working Group Focal Points, to the COMCEC Follow-up Committee Meetings and the COMCEC Sessions.
- The Session encouraged the Member States, which have registered to the COMCEC Working Groups to actively participate in the upcoming Meetings of the relevant Working Groups.
- Noting with appreciation that the number of Member States having registered to at least one COMCEC Working Group has reached 50 the Session requested the Member States, which have not done so yet, to register to the COMCEC Working Groups and actively participate in the upcoming Meetings of the Working Groups.
- The Session took note with appreciation that the member countries namely Indonesia, the Gambia, Nigeria and Turkey have already set up national coordination mechanisms for facilitating the coordination of COMCEC related work particularly the implementation of the COMCEC Resolutions and Ministerial Policy Recommendations at the national level and encouraged the other Member States to set up similar coordination mechanisms

for these purposes.

- The Session called upon the working group focal points to be actively involved in the knowledge production efforts of the COMCEC through, among others, assisting in collection and verification of country specific data and providing feedbacks to research studies.
- The Session expressed its appreciation to the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC, ICDT, IDB Group, ICD, ICIEC, ICCIA, and SMIIC for their efforts towards the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy.
- The Session reiterated the relevant resolutions of the 36th and 37th COMCEC Sessions, which emphasize the role of COMCEC in ensuring the overall coordination of the activities of the OIC relating to economic and commercial cooperation among the Member States, in accordance with its mandate and also emphasized the role of COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO) in undertaking activities with the Member States, the OIC Institutions and other international organizations in order to realize the objectives of the COMCEC as outlined in its Statute.
- The Session also reiterated its request to the OIC Institutions working in the economic and commercial fields to continue coordination with the COMCEC Coordination Office, including through the Sessional Committee, in order to ensure progress and complementarity in the implementation both of the COMCEC Strategy and the OIC 2025: Program of Action, especially in the areas of trade and investment.
- The Session adopted the recommendations of the 37th Meeting of the Follow-up Committee of the COMCEC held in virtual-only format on 8-9 June 2021.
- 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

Since the 37th Session of the COMCEC, the 18th round of COMCEC Working Group Meetings was held in May 2022 (17th meeting for the Financial Cooperation Working Group). Apart from the relevant public institutions, representatives from the private sector and NGOs as well as relevant international organizations participated in the working group meetings for enabling the reflection of a wide range of stakeholders' perspectives during the discussions.

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

3.1.1. COMCEC Trade Working Group

International trade is an important catalyst for economic and social development. The evidence shows that enhancing international trade in countries contributes to the elevation of living standards, investments and employment. Many countries perceive international trade as an

important tool for strengthening their integration with other countries and have taken important steps towards increasing trade and improving trading environment through multilateral, regional, and bilateral initiatives.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are backbone of both national economies and international trade. They have great importance, impacts and functions on national and international social, financial, economic environment including investment, productivity, employment, income distribution and intra-region and international trade.

However, despite their contributions to national economies today, SMEs tend to be underrepresented in international trade. Although there has also been a great efforts and programs to increase the SMEs internationalization at national, regional and international levels, their share in international trade, particularly in national export volume is not at the desired level yet.

The share of SMEs in international trade still remain limited for numerous reasons such as lack of relevant skills and lack of knowledge about international markets, non-tariff barriers, complex customs and other border control procedures, number of national and international regulations as well as limited access to trade finance.

Supporting the internationalization of SMEs will also remain a priority in SME competitiveness policies in many countries, particularly in the OIC Member Countries, which have been facing difficulties in enabling the participation of their SMEs into international trade.

Within this framework, the COMCEC Trade Working Group (TWG) has devoted its 18th and 19th meetings to “Increasing Internationalization of SMEs in the OIC Member Countries”.

During its 18th Meeting of the TWG, the first draft of the research report on this subject towards the preparation of a guide that will contribute the Member Countries’ endeavors for enhancing internationalization of SMEs in their respective countries has been discussed. Furthermore, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries, international organizations and the private sector with regard to increasing internationalization of SMEs have been shared with the participants. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 19th Meeting of the TWG to be held in October 2022.

All the documents prepared for the Working Group Meetings are available on the COMCEC website (www.comcec.org).

3.1.2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

The COVID-19 pandemic has had unusual implications on the transportation systems and services of the countries. The responses to COVID-19, from implementing social distancing to lockdown policies for affected areas, have huge implications for the mobility and connectivity of people and goods, the continuity of transport services, and therefore the entire sector including economic activity of cities, regions, freight logistics, as well as related industries, markets and supply chains.

Measures to contain the outbreak have resulted in a dramatic reduction in transport activity. However, after the acceleration and dissemination of vaccination, especially as of the second half of 2021, the openings brought a positive effect quickly. In fact, the countries have effective and durable transport infrastructure system have been more advantageous than the other countries in getting out of the pandemic more easily.

The existence of a functional transportation system is truly a prerequisite for economic growth as well as for all segments of society to enjoy the benefits of national economic development. Both direct and indirect impacts of transport infrastructure can be transformative in terms of economic and social development of countries. Alongside its direct impact, the indirect impact of infrastructure arises through a variety of channels, including the enabling of productive private investment, the creation of new supply chains, or the reshaping of economic geography.

Considering the importance of assessing the economic and social impacts of transport infrastructures in the Islamic countries, the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) has devoted its 18th and 19th meetings to "Economic and Social Impacts of Transport Infrastructures: An Overview of OIC Member Countries".

A research report with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TCWG meetings (18th and 19th). The report will provide global practices for the assessments of economic and social impacts of transport infrastructures, identify key success factors and challenges in the OIC Member Countries, and provide a set of policy recommendations to address these challenges. The preliminary findings of the research report, the experiences and perspectives of the Member Countries as well as international organizations were elaborated during the 18th TCWG Meeting. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 19th TCWG meeting.

The 19th Meeting of COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group will be held in October 2022 with the same theme of 18th Meeting.

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

3.1.3. COMCEC Tourism Working Group

Tourism sector, by its very nature, has been affected most severely by the pandemic. In fact, it is considered one of the hardest hit sectors by the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic has had affected on global tourism and how this affects everything from jobs and economies to wildlife conservation and the protection of cultural heritage is seen worldwide.

According to the latest data from UNWTO, the COVID-19 pandemic cut tourism direct GDP by more than half in 2020, reducing it by USD 2.0 trillion, to 1.8% of world GDP. This plunge represents about 70% of the overall decline in world GDP in 2020. International tourist arrivals dropped by 73% in 2020, while export revenues from tourism (international tourism receipts and passenger transport) declined by 63% in real terms. UNWTO estimated that international tourism experienced a mild 4,6 % upturn in 2021. However, arrivals remained 71 % below the levels of pre-pandemic year 2019. This follows a 73% plunge in international travel in 2020, the worst year on record for tourism due to the unprecedented impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourism continued its recovery in January 2022, with much better performance compared to the weak start of 2021. After the unprecedented growth of 2022 and 2021, international tourism is expected to continue its gradual recovery in 2022.

As the tourism industry is a highly labor-intensive industry, it relies heavily on the skills and performance of its employees to carry the valued products and services of the business to the guests. The performance of its human resources is recognized as a significant and determining factor in organization sustainability. Therefore, the element of human resources in the hotel industry has become a critical success factor in determining sustainable human resource management. Furthermore, with the current COVID-19 pandemic and the “new normal”,

human capital plays a vital role in the recovery of tourism and hospitality businesses. The crisis thus brings with it the opportunity to align the tourism sector towards a more resilient, human-centered future.

Given the importance of the issue, the 18th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) was held on May 12th, 2022 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Sustainable Human Resource Management in Tourism Sector”.

A research report with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TWG Meetings. While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 18th TWG meeting, the final version of the report will be submitted to the 19th TWG meeting, to be held in October 2022. The main objective of the study is to establish a conceptual foundation for better understanding of human resource management on tourism in the OIC Member Countries and come up with sound policies to tackle the challenges arisen so far.

The expected outcome of this study will be a comprehensive, but concise overview of human resource management on tourism in the OIC Member Countries, highlighting crucial issues and challenges, which OIC countries face during and after COVID-19, and major recommendations outlining how these issues can be addressed by the various players.

The first draft report reveals important findings in terms of human resource management for tourism sector in the world as well as in the member countries. The first draft report provides a conceptual framework on human resource management on the tourism sector in the world as well as in the OIC region, and the global trends and successful implementations for the implications of human resource management on tourism. In light of the discussion during the meeting and with the active contribution of the member countries, the draft report will be improved.

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

3.1.4. COMCEC Agriculture Working Group

The global lockdown due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 has deeply affected the agriculture and food systems, like other economic sectors, in almost all countries. Considering the need for increased capacity and productivity in the agriculture sector which is facing challenges arising from the climate change and the recent disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic the COMCEC Agriculture Working Group devoted its Meetings in 2022 to discuss on "Transforming Food Systems After COVID-19: Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems in the OIC Member Countries".

A research report is being prepared on the aforementioned subject with the aim of guiding the member countries on how to develop knowledge and information systems and applicable practices in the agriculture sector to enhance the production and improve the productivity in the sector. The preliminary findings of the report were presented during the 18th Meeting of the Working Group. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 19th Meeting of the Working Group which will be held in October, 2022.

All the documents and presentations made during the 18th Working Group Meeting are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.5. COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group

The COVID-19 outbreak has compelled the governments to take strict measures such as closing borders, curfews, travel restrictions and quarantine measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic. While these measures have been effective in preventing the spread of the pandemic, they have also brought socio-economic challenges in many low and middle-income countries, including OIC member countries where poverty and unregistered employment are intense and social protection systems are weak.

As a result of the restrictions applied due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the economic problems experienced all over the world, unfortunately, led to job losses and other income losses, so more people became poor. Due to all these difficulties and the loss of achievements in poverty reduction in the last decades, the Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) has put the issue of providing social assistance more effectively on its agenda again and dedicated its Meetings in 2022 to discuss this issue.

In this respect, the 18th Meeting of the COMCEC PAWG was held on May 10th, 2022, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Effective Social Assistance Provision and Socioeconomic Empowerment in light of COVID-19 Pandemic in the OIC Member Countries.” The 19th Meeting of the Working Group will be held with the same theme in October, 2022.

A specific research report is being prepared on this crucial topic. The first draft of the said report was presented at the 18th Meeting of the Working Group. The draft report includes background and key concepts of Monitoring and Information System (MIS) applied in social assistance programs, and reviews the experiences and recommended practices from the OIC as well as non-OIC countries. The final version of the said research report will be submitted to 19th Meeting of the Working Group.

All the documents and presentations made during the 18th Meeting of the PAWG are available on the COMCEC website. (www.comcec.org)

3.1.6. COMCEC Financial Cooperation Working Group

The institutional base and product diversity in Islamic Finance has been growing remarkably in recent years and Islamic Financial Institutions (IFIs) are spreading worldwide. On the other hand, there are several challenges faced in this important sector including the lack of standardization which is considered as one of the most crucial issues in front of the sector. To illustrate, different interpretations of the Shariah law trigger dichotomy, especially at product level among countries, even within a country where different practices can be observed concerning the approval of an Islamic Finance product.

Given the importance of the subject, the 17th Meeting of the Financial Cooperation Working Group (FCWG) was held on May 9th, 2022, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Standardization Efforts in Islamic Finance”. The 18th Meeting of the Working Group will be held with the same theme in October, 2022.

The research report that is being prepared for the 17th and 18th Meetings focused on the Standardization Efforts in Islamic Finance in the OIC member countries. Besides, the study elaborates and analyzes the recent initiatives and issues on the standardization by covering key Islamic Finance sectors. The preliminary findings of the report were presented during the 17th Meeting of the Working Group. The final version of the report will be submitted to the 18th Meeting of the Working Group which will be held in October, 2022.

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

3.2. COMCEC Financial Support Instruments

3.2.1. The COMCEC Project Funding

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

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

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

Under the 9th Call for Project Proposals made in September 2021, 17 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2022 as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC Project Funding under in 2022 Implementation Year.

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
1	Benin	Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Togo	Agriculture	Promote Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture to Ensure Food Security and Good Nutrition in West Africa
2	Turkey	Pakistan, Jordan, Palestine, Indonesia, Morocco, Qatar	Agriculture	Capacity Building on New Technologies to Reduce Post-Harvest Losses
3	Qatar	Morocco, Sudan, Egypt	Agriculture	Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies for Reducing the Climate Changes Effects on Agriculture Production
4	ICCIA	Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Nigeria, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan	Agriculture	Creating Awareness on the Importance of Agriculture Commodity Exchange Markets
5	IOFS	11 Member Countries	Agriculture	Building the Capacity of OIC Member States in Food Security Governance
6	SESRIC	41 Member Countries	Financial Cooperation	Strengthening Financial Literacy and Promoting Islamic Finance in the OIC Member Countries

No	Project Owner	Project Partners	Cooperation Area	Project Title
7	Türkiye	Jordan, Pakistan, Tunisia	Poverty Alleviation	Impacts of Digitalization in Social Assistance Program for Forced Migration
8	SESRIC	15 Member Countries	Poverty Alleviation	Fostering Information Technology (IT) Solutions to Improve the Effectiveness of Public Employment Services (PES) in the OIC Member Countries
9	Uganda	Egypt, Indonesia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan	Tourism	Risk Analysis and Crisis Planning and Management for Community Based Tourism
10	Nigeria	The Gambia, Sudan, Türkiye	Tourism	A Two-Day Training on Human Resource Management in Tourism Sector
11	Palestine	Kuwait, Qatar	Trade	Enhancing Palestinian Limestone-SMEs Internationalization
12	Lebanon	Malaysia, Morocco and Turkey	Trade	Developing a Roadmap for Establishing National Trade Facilitation Body in Lebanon
13	Morocco	Türkiye, UAE, Indonesia	Trade	Accelerating customs clearance of goods between OIC Member countries through the exchange of Electronic Certificate of Origin
14	Indonesia	Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia	Trade	Upscaling exports strategy and market access assistance for SMEs
15	SMIIC	17 Member Countries	Trade	Promotion of OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards use in the Asian and Arab Region
16	The Gambia	Senegal, Nigeria, Türkiye	Transport and Communications	Improving Human and Institutional Capacity for the Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the Transport Sector of the OIC Countries
17	SESRIC	16 Member Countries	Transport and Communications	Improving the Regulatory Framework for PPPs in Transport Sector in the OIC Member Countries

3.2.2. COMCEC COVID Response

With a view to address the existing and potential ramifications of the COVID Pandemic, the CCO 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 is financing certain types of projects, which focus on needs assessment, sharing expertise and provide direct grants to final beneficiaries.

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

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

Finally, Direct Grant projects enable the Project Owner Member Countries to procure machinery, equipment or services to directly meet the needs of the final beneficiaries, such as institutions, farmers or SMEs.

In this regard, the CCO started the 2nd Call for project proposal to be financed under new CCR Program in 2022 in October 2021. After the appraisal process, a total of 7 projects have been

selected to be financed. Table 2 below shows the List of Projects to be financed by the COMCEC Coordination Office under CCR in 2022.

Table 2: Projects to be financed through the COMCEC COVID Response in 2022

	Project Owner	Cooperation Area		Type of the Project
1	Azerbaijan	Agriculture	Reduction of Food Loss and Waste (FLOW) during COVID-19 Pandemic through Promoting Climate Smart Agriculture and Socially Responsible Practices	Sharing Expertise (Visiting Expert)
2	Benin	Agriculture	Increase Rice Productivity to Ensure Food Security and Sovereignty in Benin	Direct Grant
3	Türkiye	Agriculture	Resilience in the Seed Sector with the Rising of Risks after Covid-19	Sharing Expertise (Workshop)
4	Nigeria	Tourism	Adapting Tourism Workforce to the New Normal in the Hospitality Sector after COVID-19	Sharing Expertise (Training)
5	Sierra Leone	Tourism	Preparation of COVID-19 Hygiene Protocol and Training of Employees within the Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Sector	Sharing Expertise (Training)
6	Senegal	Trade	Resilience Program Against Covid-19 for the Digital Management of Agricultural Markets	Direct Grant
7	The Gambia	Transport and Communications	Alleviating the Negative Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Air Transportation Sub-Sector of the Gambia and OIC Countries	Sharing Expertise (Visiting Expert)

3.2.3. COMCEC Al Quds Program

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

In 2021-2022 implementation period, 5 projects are being implemented covering the areas of among others, exhibitions, art production, trainings, capacity building, procurement of machinery/equipment/service, online platform development, renovations, research, audio-visual material production etc.

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

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

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 37th 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 the TPS-OIC Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Meeting, which was held virtually in 2021, the Committee agreed upon 1st July 2022 as the cut-off date for the effectuation of the system and requested the concerned member states to expedite the completion of their internal procedures and other preparations until that date. The 37th Session of the COMCEC expressed its appreciation to the Republic of Turkey for hosting and COMCEC Coordination Office and ICDT for organizing virtual TNC Meeting on 1-2 June, 2021, with the participation of 11 Participating States having ratified the TPS-OIC Agreements and submitted their concession lists. The Session also endorsed the decisions of the TNC Meeting, in particular determination of July 1st, 2022 as the cut-off date for the effectuation of the system, and requested the concerned member states to complete the necessary internal procedures and other preparations until that date.
- The Forums operating in the field of financial cooperation under the COMCEC provide important and 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 and an international investment fund on said Index. Furthermore, the Forum has been working on the establishment of a gold exchange/platform for the OIC Member Countries. The 15th Meeting of the Forum was held on 5-6 October in 2021. Details regarding the Forum activities are available on the Forum website. (www.oicexchanges.org)

- The COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum provides a comprehensive 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 10th Meeting of the Forum was organized on November 9th, in 2021. (www.comceccmr.org)
- 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 3rd Meeting of the Forum was organized as a virtual-only format, on September 29th, in 2021.
- 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 37th Session of the COMCEC, SESRIC has continued to prepare regular technical background reports and research studies on a wide range of socio-economic issues on the agendas of various OIC conferences and related meetings, particularly the sectoral ministerial conferences and the annual sessions of the relevant standing committees. In doing so, the Centre continued to make a significant contribution to the OIC policy dialogue mechanism by analyzing the current situation at the OIC level and suggesting appropriate policy actions to address the challenges and strengthen intra-OIC cooperation in the relevant fields.
- The Centre also continued to contribute to the efforts of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) towards enhancing 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 and in its capacity as the Secretariat of the OIC Statistical Commission (OIC-StatCom) and through its Statistical Capacity Building (StatCaB) Programme, the Centre contributes significantly to the technical capacity building of the NSOs and other constituents of the NSSs of the OIC Member States.
- During the period under review, SESRIC has made efforts to strengthen intra-OIC South-South cooperation by implementing a wide range of capacity building programmes and training activities on various socio-economic fields of immediate interest to the OIC Member States. Currently, the Centre has 19 sector-specific capacity building programmes covering a wide range of areas such as finance, agriculture, health, environment, water resources, poverty alleviation, disaster risk management, public employment and tourism. These programmes are implemented in close cooperation with relevant national institutions of the OIC Member States through various modalities, including training courses, training workshops and study visits.
- During this critical and difficult period, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite all the technical challenges, SESRIC exerted significant efforts and utilized digital platforms to carry out its planned capacity building training activities with special emphasis on relevant important topics taking place on the agenda of the COMCEC during these exceptional times.

- Furthermore, during the period under review, SESRIC signed an agreement with the Bureau of Statistics of Guyana on 11 April 2022 to strengthen its ties for a better implementation of the relevant objectives of the COMCEC Strategy and the Ministerial Policy Recommendations.

5. Conclusion

The COMCEC Strategy has brought a new dynamism to the economic and commercial cooperation efforts under the auspices of the COMCEC. The COMCEC Working Groups, being one of the implementation instruments of the Strategy ensured 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 for addressing common problems in the respective fields.

Since the 37th Session of the COMCEC Ministerial Meeting, six Working Group Meetings have been held virtually in the relevant sectors. The Meetings attended by the representatives from the Member States, OIC Institutions, relevant international institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, focused on significant issues in the six cooperation areas of the COMCEC. The Working Groups considered the first drafts of thematic research reports prepared for the meetings and experiences of the Member States and international institutions. Final versions of the research reports will be submitted to the Working Groups, which will be held in October 2022.

Within the implementation of the COMCEC Project Funding, under the 9th Call for Project Proposals, 17 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2022. Moreover, 7 project will be implemented under the framework of the 2nd Call of COMCEC COVID Response. Furthermore, under COMCEC Al-Quds Program, 5 projects are expected to be finalized in 2022. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC website.