

THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 19th MEETING OF THE AGRICULTURE WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Agriculture Working Group (AWG) successfully held its 19th Meeting on October 10th, 2022, in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Transforming Food Systems After COVID-19: Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems in the OIC Member Countries”. During the Meeting, AWG made deliberations on the policy recommendations related to improving agricultural knowledge and information systems. In the light of the main findings of the report and the intense deliberations during 19th Meeting, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

Policy Recommendation 1: Developing a sound stakeholder coordinating and consulting mechanism to provide a common framework in which all actors can operate in an aligned and harmonized way.

Rationale: It is important to establish some type of loosely defined coordinating body for the various components of the AKIS to provide a common framework in which all actors can operate in an aligned and harmonized way. Coordination should not be so strict to discourage competition for innovation.

At a minimum level, mechanisms are needed to harmonize policies and strategies such as prioritization of research and innovation. Supreme Council for Science and Technology and Agriculture and Forestry Council of Türkiye and The Plant Congress (Plantekongressen) of Denmark are good examples of coordinating and consulting mechanisms among stakeholders.

Policy Recommendation 2: Making use of Public-Private Partnerships for effective AKIS governance and financing.

Rationale: Managing new challenges agriculture faces such as climate change, geopolitical risk; supply-chain disruptions require good policy design, sustained investments, and sound financing framework. While public is dominant actor in the governance and financing of the AKIS, the private sector plays an increasingly important role in through commercial programs to sell its inputs, products, and its innovative capabilities. The public should improve patterns of interaction among all stakeholders, design and enforce an enabling regulatory framework, provide financing. PPP mechanisms can be instrumental ways in boosting the volume of research, extension, and advisory services for agriculture. PPPs are special arrangements to maximize service quality by exploiting the creativity and synergy of public and private. Well-designed PPPs bring social benefits by leveraging resources and capabilities of the private actors and the public.

Policy Recommendation 3: Investing in new talent for agriculture through developing connections and networks between youth and AKIS institutions to prepare workforce of the future.

Rationale: While the workforce in agriculture is aging, ensuring the interest and participation of the new generations to come in agriculture is essential for the competitiveness and sustainability of the industry. To increase youth employment in agriculture, new mechanisms are needed to put in place to improve their technical knowledge and skills.

Talent development programs to make attractive for young people to choose a career in agriculture for the postgraduate students as well as young farmers is essential component of transforming the AKIS. Such programs should include new agricultural Technologies such as precision, better data usage and business development techniques. Young farmers and agri-entrepreneurs might be promoted to take part in global forums, which connects and empowers young people to discuss their local priorities and challenges and identify innovative and actionable solutions for a better food future.

Policy Recommendation 4: Including seasonal agriculture workers into the AKIS for better harnessing their potential in terms of investment, job creation and agricultural productivity.

Rationale: While agriculture mostly creates seasonal jobs, the number of seasonal workers is often underestimated. In many countries, seasonal workers are important part of the production of the most the strategic products within the OIC Member Countries. The seasonal farm labour market is growing in the OIC Region. Education and skill levels of seasonal workers vary widely; they are often excluded from extension services. Training programs for them often concentrates on workers right and protecting health. Effective AKIS should include seasonal workers as an important component of the agricultural ecosystem for better harnessing their potential in terms of investment, job creation and agricultural productivity.

Policy Recommendation 5: Developing a sound system for effective monitoring and evaluation from the beginning to better understand the impact of AKIS.

Rationale: Establishment of sound monitoring and evaluation system from the beginning is crucial to see the impact of the system. Reporting matrix of public, private industry, NGO, FO, academic & research institution, development agencies, INGOs, IFIs through bottom-up and participatory approaches serve to enhance partnerships and build a sense of ownership and consensus among actors. AKIS needs systems that assess its impact and outcome to feed this information back to policy making and coordination units. Reporting mechanism is needed to coordinate mutual interests of AKIS triangle.

Policy Recommendation 6: Strengthening the information and communications technology (ICT) Systems for AKIS to address the need for localized and customized information.

Rationale: ICT Systems allows producers adequate, timely access to technical and marketing information. ICT systems allows more farmers to benefit from existing knowledge and information via creation of local, regional, and global information networks. Such networks allow collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving and research practices. ICTs could be integrated into AKIS in many ways such as agricultural radio & television channels, internet portals, social media, and mobile services. Knowledge and information disseminated via these systems include information for climate change, early warning for drought and extreme weather conditions, diseases, and price & market data. ICT systems also brings new opportunities for farmers to share their experiences with each other.

Policy Recommendation 7: Developing an AgriTech & FoodTech ecosystem for the creation and growth of new companies and supporting the existing ones.

Rationale: Developing an AgriTech & FoodTech ecosystem is essential to facilitate the transition of agri-food systems to meet both consumers' demands and sustainable development goals. AgriTech is the intersection products, services, applications derived from agriculture to improve yield, efficiency, and profitability while FoodTech is the intersection of agriculture, food, and technology along the value-chain from harvest, storage, processing to distribution and retail. AgriTech includes field sensors, drones, farm-management software, robotics, vertical farming. FoodTech direct-to-consumer food delivery platforms, products, and services to innovate food processing and improve food ingredients, next-generation food, and drinks such as plant-based milk and meat, waste management and food packaging. Developing such an ecosystem that will contribute to the creation and growth of new companies is necessary to attract growing global investment to agriculture. Volume of investment in AgriTech reached to \$ 5.2 billion in 2021.

Policy Recommendation 8: Developing a virtual network of OIC AKIS institutions to increase collaboration among OIC Member Countries.

Rationale: While different sources of knowledge are needed to deal with vital agricultural issues, agricultural competitiveness depends on collaborative actions for innovation. Cross border collaboration in research and innovation creates a more integrated market for research. Development of a virtual network of OIC AKIS institutions would facilitate experience sharing among the OIC member countries. Such a virtual network can create an inventory of existing projects and expertise, showcase best practices. Virtual OIC AKIS Network may gradually lead to joint project development and execution mechanism where funding institutions, research institutions, universities, private companies, FO interact for innovation projects.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Recommendations:

COMCEC Agriculture Working Group: In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner. Working Group may work on a prioritization and sequencing of the policy areas.

COMCEC Project Funding: Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit projects to be financed by the COMCEC. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office can support financing the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include training programs, study visits, workshops, organizing seminars, peer-to-peer experience sharing, needs assessments and producing promotional materials/documents.