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

Proceedings of the 25th Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

"Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries"

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
October 2025

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

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 25th MEETING OF THE
COMCEC TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP
ON

"Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries"

(17-18 September 2025)

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
October 2025

For further information please contact:

Ms. Betül ÖZAL KARAHAN
Working Group Coordinator

COMCEC Coordination Office
Necatibey Caddesi No: 110/A
06100 Yücetepe
Ankara/TÜRKİYE
Phone : +90 312 294 57 10
Fax : +90 312 294 57 77
Web: www.comcec.org
E-mail: transport@comcec.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The 25th Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group was held in Ankara on 17-18 September 2025, with the theme of "Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries".

The Meeting was attended by the representatives of 18 Member Countries, namely; Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Egypt, The Gambia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uganda and Türkiye. The Meeting was also attended by the representatives of Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) and COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO).[1]

During the Meeting, the representatives of the Member Countries exchanged their experiences, achievements, and challenges in enhancing and sustaining rural accessibility in their respective countries.

Moreover, they have deliberated on global trends concerning how to enhance and sustain rural accessibility, to reach profound success and to overcome challenges faced in OIC Member Countries.

The Meeting has mainly elaborated on the findings of the Policy Guide titled "Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries", conducted by the CCO. The meeting also considered the Guide describing the process for effective rural transport planning and the policy recommendations produced based upon the main findings of the Policy Guide. The meeting came up with concrete policy recommendations to be submitted to the 41st Ministerial Session of the COMCEC for the kind consideration and the adoption of Honorable Ministers.

1. Opening Remarks

The Meeting started with a recitation from the Holy Quran. After the recitation from the Holy Quran, Mr. Selçuk KOÇ, Director General of the COMCEC Coordination Office, made the opening speech on behalf of the COMCEC Coordination Office.

At the outset, Mr. KOÇ drew an attention a humanitarian tragedy deeply concerning the Islamic Ummah and strongly condemned the ongoing Israeli genocide against Palestinian people as well as wishing Allah's mercy upon the martyrs and for the peace and prosperity for the people of Gaza and the entire Ummah.

[1] The list of participants is attached as Annex 4

During his opening remarks, Mr. KOÇ briefly introduced the COMCEC and its activities, highlighting the importance of studying the theme of enhancing and sustaining rural accessibility.

Mr. KOÇ emphasized the indispensable role of rural transport not only for the roads and transportation links, but also for bridging the rural communities with market access, education and healthcare services as well. In this regard, he pointed out that sufficient level of infrastructure and connectivity is critical for rural population, to have higher access to market, to reap the fruits of development, and thereby to benefit the opportunities for growth and prosperity, that is, the key of inclusive and sustainable development.

Mr. KOÇ also underlined the issue of each country's differing level in rural accessibility due to various infrastructure and connectivity challenges stemming from diverse geographical, social and economic contexts. While considering that nearly half of the OIC population lives in rural areas, he mentioned that rural development and transport connectivity are highly critical issue for achieving inclusive growth and strengthening solidarity among the Member Countries.

Given this context, Mr. KOÇ stressed that these challenges faced can be smoothly overcome through, for example, partnerships, innovative financing mechanisms, technology transfer initiatives, knowledge exchange programs, joint research projects, and capacity-building initiatives among the member countries, and real potential our Member Countries can be achieved for inclusive and sustainable transportation systems.

Mr. KOÇ continued his speech by expressing his expectations on benefiting the inclusive effect of the rural accessibility in development as the Member Countries through the Policy Guide which has been preparing as the outcome of the 24th and 25th COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group Meeting. Furthermore, Mr. KOÇ highlighted the importance of fruitful discussions and deliberations during the Meeting by expressing his good wishes for the conduct of the Meeting.

Afterwards, Mr. Mehran KHAMISIZADEH, Deputy Director General from the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development of Iran, chaired the Meeting. Mr. KHAMISIZADEH welcomed all participants and expressed his appreciation to the delegations for their participation.

2. COMCEC Transport and Communications Outlook

Ms. Betül ÖZAL KARAHAN, Working Group Coordinator of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group delivered a presentation on the main findings of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Outlook. At the outset, Ms. KARAHAN underscored the importance of the transport and communications sector as one of the six cooperation areas specified by the COMCEC Strategy.

This is followed by emphasizing the relation between transport, logistics and trade and how they affect each other. She stressed that transport and communications, as the backbone of economic activity and human connection, facilitate trade links producers to markets and connects people to essential services as well as competitiveness in the global economy. In this regard, Ms. KARAHAN explained that "Logistics Performance Index (LPI)" shows the strong correlation between a country's LPI score and its merchandise exports, meaning that better logictics lead to higher trade volumes. Therefore, it was also pointed out that by improving the LPI score, it is quite possible to boost trade and foster economic interdependence among the Member Countries.

Ms. KARAHAN continued her presentation by informing the august house on certain statistical data related to, for example, length of road network, rail network density, change in total fleet and air passenger traffic. Through these data, Ms. KARAHAN highlighted the effects and importance of global trends, shocks, challenges and the economic structure of OIC Member Countries in her presentation.

At the last part of her presentation, Ms. KARAHAN touched upon the topic "rural accessibility" in line with the theme of Policy Guide in this year, 2025. In this sense, Ms. KARAHAN explained several indicators and graphs regarding to rural accessibility by stressing that rural accessibility is highly crucial for a country's development process. For example, the participants were briefied on the rural vs. urban population percentage in OIC Member Countries, stressing that significant portion of the population in Member Countries, nearly half of them, lives in rural where the access to essential services are a challenging issue.

Ms. KARAHAN also pointed out the "Rural Accessibility Index (RAI)" as an important indicator in this issue. In terms of OIC Member Countries, while some countries like Lebanon and Bahrain have very high access rates at 99%, many others fall behind, underlining the disparity as a stark reminder of the social impact of poor transport infrastructure. Moreover, Ms. KARAHAN continued her presentation by giving information on the rate of electricity access and healthcare accessibility in OIC Member Countries, again recalling the importance of adequate infrastructure.

Afterwards, Ms. KARAHAN concluded his presentation by highlighting the necessity to focus on cooperation, investment, and policy coordination to close these infrastructure and logistics gaps.

3. Presentation of the Draft Policy Guide

Dr. Akif FİDANOĞLU from Hisartech Consultancy delivered a presentation on the draft research report. Dr. FİDANOĞLU, firstly, introduced the study's aims: (1) diagnosing the main challenges affecting rural accessibility in OIC Member Countries, (2) identifing and analyze effective practices from both OIC and non-OIC contexts, (3) developing guiding principles and recommended actions for improving accessibility, and (4) facilitating knowledge sharing and capacity development among stakeholders.

In this regard, Dr. FİDANOĞLU described the study's multi-phase methodology as combining desk-based research (literature review and policy mapping across OIC regions), analysis of international benchmarks, in-depth field visits in Morocco and Indonesia, desk-based case studies of Türkiye, Canada and Australia using national datasets and policy documentation, and surveys plus stakeholder engagement through structured questionnaires.

Morocco, at the case study, was presented as a key example from OIC Member Countries where geographical and socioeconomic challenges intersect. In this regard, Dr. FİDANOĞLU noted Morocco's strategic position as a crossroads between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, but also highlighted the constraints posed by mountainous terrain and dispersed settlements. Agriculture remains the backbone of rural livelihoods, vital for both exports and food security. Given this context, Dr. FİDANOĞLU mentioned that the flagship initiative, Program for the Reduction of Territorial and Social Disparities in the Rural World (PRDTS), launched in 2017, was examined in depth. With an investment envelope of approximately 50 billion dirhams over 2017–2023, financed by national, regional, and donor sources, the program sought to reduce regional inequalities by improving connectivity, education, healthcare, and access to basic services. Furthermore, Dr. FİDANOĞLU underlined that the results are substantial: more than 22,000 km of rural roads constructed or rehabilitated, over 4,000 education-related projects, and electrification of 1,135 villages. Dr. FİDANOĞLU also emphasized that Morocco's experience offers lessons on the value of cross-sectoral coordination, participatory planning, and regionalized governance, while also noting ongoing challenges in infrastructure maintenance, mountain–plain disparities, and financing sustainability.

The Indonesia, as another case study, provided another rich example, reflecting the complexity of accessibility across an archipelagic nation with over 75,000 villages, of which 73% of the population are registered as village residents. Despite significant progress, gaps remain; thousands of villages still lack reliable electricity or internet access, and nearly 40% have no formal public transport. Rural road quality is uneven—56.7% rated good, 35% moderate, and 8% poor. The government's Pioneer Road Transport (PRT) program subsidizes connectivity for remote, border, and disadvantaged areas, operating 309 schedules across 32 provinces. Complementary mechanisms include the Village Fund Framework (IDR 610 trillion, 2015–2024), which allocates resources for rural infrastructure, digitalization, and social protection, and the Rural Transportation Special Allocation Fund (SAF) supporting roads, bridges, ports, and microbuses in hard-to-reach regions. These efforts are integrated under the RPJMN 2025–2029 National Development Plan, which prioritizes connectivity, inclusivity, and sustainability to achieve goals such as increased GNI per capita and reduced poverty. Indonesia's experience demonstrates how an integrated, multimodal strategy—combining road, maritime, and digital infrastructure—can drive inclusive growth in geographically fragmented contexts.

Among the non-OIC cases, Australia was highlighted for its high Rural Access Index (95.35%), despite its vast and sparsely populated territory. Its success is underpinned by integrated connectivity planning through the ARIA+ GIS-based remoteness index, combining roads, aviation, and broadband networks to ensure access to services. On the other hand, Dr. FİDANOĞLU mentioned that Canada, with a rural access rate of 93.4%, showcases a multi-modal approach where remote and Indigenous communities benefit from subsidized air transport, telemedicine, and innovative logistics such as drone delivery. Furthermore, Türkiye was also discussed as a leading OIC example with an RAI of 95.8%, strong historical investment through KÖYDES and UKKS programs, and integration of rural transport with development strategies under IPARD. Persistent challenges include regional disparities and rural depopulation, but emerging opportunities lie in rural tourism and agri-market connectivity.

In conclusion, Dr. FİDANOĞLU emphasized that achieving sustainable rural accessibility in OIC countries requires integrated, multi-sectoral, and context-sensitive approaches. Beyond physical infrastructure, policies must address governance, financing, and social inclusion to ensure that improved access translates into tangible development outcomes. Investment in multimodal transport, digital infrastructure, and social services—supported by participatory governance and equitable regional planning—remains essential for enabling mobility, inclusion, and opportunity across the Islamic world

4. Presentation of the Survey Findings of the Draft Policy Guide

In this session of the meeting, Dr. Akif FİDANOĞLU presented the survey component of the research, introducing its structure, scope, and methodology. The survey explored perceptions and evidence on emerging transport technologies, accessibility challenges, and sustainability trade-offs in rural contexts, with responses collected across diverse OIC Member Countries.

Dr. FİDANOĞLU initially outlined the study's framing of Electric Vehicles (EVs) and charging equity, noting that rural EV adoption significantly lags behind urban areas due to limited charging infrastructure, affordability constraints, and low market incentives. However, he emphasized that international experience demonstrates rural regions can lead in EV uptake when strong policy support and incentive frameworks exist.

Regarding Autonomous Vehicles (AVs), Dr. FİDANOĞLU highlighted that poor rural road quality and limited digital connectivity constrain AV readiness, although respondents identified clear potential in niche applications such as drone operations, targeted delivery pilots, and precision agriculture.

On Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), he noted that urban-focused ITS functions—like traffic signal management or congestion pricing—are less relevant in low-density rural settings. Instead, rural ITS applications should prioritize safety enhancement, road maintenance, weather monitoring, and demand-responsive services. The survey revealed that nearly 70% of respondents believe smart mobility technologies can improve efficiency, provided existing infrastructure and service gaps are addressed.

Dr. FİDANOĞLU also discussed the findings on car dependency, stressing that private vehicles remain a necessity in most rural areas. Over 80% of respondents agreed that the absence of reliable public transport compels residents to rely on cars. The results reflected a tension between accessibility and emissions objectives, underscoring the policy challenge of balancing mobility rights with environmental commitments. The presentation proposed policy solutions that include promoting cleaner vehicles, expanding affordable shared transport, and encouraging integrated planning between transport and climate strategies.

Drawing on a database of over 100 examples and 121 good-practice projects, Dr. FİDANOĞLU classified initiatives by thematic focus—such as demand-responsive transport models, maintenance funds, and digital monitoring tools—and by country. Common lessons emerging from these cases emphasized that rural accessibility is a social right, maintenance and financing are the backbone of sustainability, and policies must be tailored to rural realities. Furthermore, climate goals should be harmonized with mobility needs, and technological solutions must be affordable, practical, and context-specific.

The presentation's policy recommendations prioritize the continued investment in road infrastructure and maintenance, the expansion of public transport networks where feasible, the adoption of mobile and demand-based transport applications, and the promotion of community-led maintenance and monitoring mechanisms.

In closing, Dr. FİDANOĞLU underscored that affordability and last-mile connectivity remain the most critical barriers to equitable access, particularly for women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, who are persistently underserved. He concluded by summarizing the consensus across survey respondents: infrastructure and maintenance must come first; digital and service innovations should complement—not replace—core access investments; and sustainable rural accessibility ultimately depends on effective governance, dedicated funding, and strong institutional coordination.

5. Member States' Experiences in Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility

a. Egypt

Mr. Hany Abdallah ELTATAWY, Supervisor of the Decent Life Initiative, delivered a presentation on the "Decent Life Project" on behalf of Egypt, a flagship national program designed to enhance rural accessibility, digital inclusion, and overall quality of life for citizens in remote communities. Mr. TATAWY stated that the initiative aims to transform living conditions across 4,500 villages through integrated interventions covering infrastructure, communications, health, education, and social development. He also underlined that implemented through a whole-of-government and multi-stakeholder approach, the project engages more than 20 ministries, 23 civil society organizations, and several private sector and development partners. The first phase, launched in July 2021, targets 1,477 villages within 52 centers across 20 governorates.

Mr. ELTATAWY continued his presentation by outlining the role of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) in the project, which leads the technological dimension of the initiative. According his deliberations, the Ministry's efforts aim to improve the technological landscape of rural Egypt, empower citizens with digital skills, and expand access to digital government services; furthermore, these interventions are structured around four key pillars:

(1) Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) deployment to provide high-speed internet access; (2) Expansion of mobile network coverage in underserved rural areas; (3) Modernization of post offices to promote financial inclusion and digital service delivery; (4) Development of digital knowledge and competencies to enhance employability and digital literacy.

Followin part of his presentation, Mr. ELTATAWY indicated that under the FTTH component, implemented by Telecom Egypt (WE), the government invested approximately 11.7 billion EGP to connect 2.48 million buildings and 6,947 government facilities with fiber-optic networks. It was also noted in the presentation that more than 1.18 million buildings have already been connected, and over 930 villages cuurently have operational broadband infrastructure, enabling citizens to access a wide range of Digital Egypt services such as online healthcare, education, licensing, and taxation platforms.

In terms of mobile network coverage, Mr. ELTATAWY showcased the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) invested 3.3 billion EGP to construct 1,672 new cell sites and upgrade 576 existing ones, achieving a 90% implementation rate and expanding quality voice and data services to 901 villages. That is, this expansion supports not only social inclusion but also economic activity by improving communication and connectivity for rural businesses and households.

Moreover, Mr. ELTATAWY stressed that the Egypt Post modernization program, with a total investment of 1.66 billion EGP, achieved 100% completion in its first phase by upgrading 817 post offices and launching 332 postal service centers in government complexes. In this sense, these centers provide postal, banking, and Digital Egypt services, equipped with ATMs to facilitate financial inclusion and access to e-government.

As the final component, Mr. ELTATAWY mentioned that Digital Knowledge and Competencies, focuses on human capital development and the digital empowerment of rural citizens. Through an investment of 35.48 million EGP, the MCIT—together with the Decent Life Foundation, line ministries, and civil society partners—has trained 164,840 citizens out of a target of 218,155, reaching 400 villages. Beneficiaries include students, entrepreneurs, women, persons with disabilities, and government employees, all gaining practical digital skills that support employment, entrepreneurship, and interaction with e-services.

In conclusion, the presentation delivered by Mr. ELTATAWY emphasized that the Decent Life Project represents Egypt's comprehensive vision for inclusive rural transformation, combining physical infrastructure with digital capacity-building. The initiative's coordinated investments in broadband, mobile coverage, postal modernization, and digital skills development have laid the foundation for sustainable connectivity, social inclusion, and balanced territorial development across Egypt's rural landscape.

b. Iraq

Ms. Haifaa NAJIM, Senior Chief Engineer at the Iraqi Railway Company, explained that the development of rural railway connectivity is a strategic priority for Iraq's sustainable economic recovery and social inclusion. She stated that rural areas continue to face economic isolation due to insufficient transport infrastructure, and noted that modern railways offer a sustainable and cost-efficient alternative for freight and passenger mobility.

Ms. NAJIM reported that only 25 percent of Iraq's railway network is currently operational, while around 50 percent requires major rehabilitation, including vital corridors such as the Baghdad–Mosul line, which remains heavily damaged by conflict. She added that poor connectivity to key agricultural governorates such as Diyala and Nineveh has limited access to domestic markets and slowed rural development.

She highlighted that the Iraq Railway Enhancement and Modernization (IREM) Project, with an investment value of USD 930 million, forms the backbone of the national rail strategy. Ms. NAJIM indicated that the project seeks to raise domestic freight capacity to 6.3 million tons and exports to 1.1 million tons by 2037, while creating 3,000 construction jobs and more than 21,000 permanent jobs by 2040. She emphasized that rail freight is expected to cut logistics costs by about 30 percent compared to road transport.

Ms. NAJIM also outlined that complementary projects include the Development Road Project, a 1,175-kilometer electric rail corridor linking Iraq with Türkiye and Europe, and the establishment of dry ports and logistics hubs connecting rural producers to global supply chains. She remarked that improved rail connectivity could bring major social and environmental benefits—enhancing access to healthcare and education for 17 million rural residents, reducing CO_2 emissions by 40 percent relative to trucks, and improving road safety by approximately 50 percent.

In the following part of her presentation, she acknowledged that several challenges persist, including a USD 500 million funding gap, security risks in post-conflict regions, and institutional fragmentation in railway governance. To address these, she mentioned that Iraq pursue public–private partnerships, encourage community-based security monitoring, and establish a centralized national rail authority for more effective coordination. Ms. NAJIM also illustrated that regional integration efforts—such as the Türkiye–Iraq Rail Link—could significantly reduce freight transit time from Basra to Türkiye from 30 days by sea to 12 days by rail, with the potential to handle 3.5 million containers annually by 2030.

In conclusion, Ms. NAJIM suggested that priority should be given to the rehabilitation of agricultural corridors like Basra–Mosul, the adoption of digital signaling systems, the mobilization of international partnerships with the World Bank and the EU, and the promotion of women's participation in railway operations. She concluded that expanding rural railway infrastructure will be transformative for Iraq's economy, environment, and regional connectivity—positioning the country as a logistics hub and a model for inclusive, sustainable transport development.

c. Qatar

Ms. Shaikha AL-MARRI, Digital Business Analysis Researcher at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), explained that Qatar's efforts to enhance rural accessibility are closely linked with the country's digital transformation agenda under Qatar National Vision 2030. She noted that this vision seeks to create harmony between economic progress, social justice, and environmental sustainability by using technology to bridge the gap between urban and rural development.

Ms. AL-MARRI stated that the MCIT's Digital Agenda 2030 defines six strategic pillars—Digital Government, Digital Economy, Digital Society, Digital Infrastructure, Digital Technologies, and Digital Innovation, which collectively guide Qatar's journey toward becoming a global leader in smart technologies. She also added that the TASMU Smart Qatar Program[2] plays a central role in operationalizing this agenda by fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurship, and improving quality of life across the country.

She introduced that within this national framework, the TASMU Livestock Monitoring and Analytics Platform serves as a flagship initiative demonstrating how digital technology can strengthen rural accessibility and food security. Ms. AL-MARRI emphasized that livestock represents a vital component of Qatar's agricultural system, with more than 1.1 million animals and 7,000 breeders contributing to national food resilience. The platform, she explained, connects farmers and breeders—especially those in remote or non-urban areas—directly with veterinary and government services, thereby supporting livelihoods and ensuring animal health.

She described that the system functions as a centralized digital platform that records livestock data, ensures traceability, and maintains medical records for each animal. She highlighted that the platform delivers several key benefits: (1) enhancing animal health and welfare through real-time monitoring tools; (2) increasing traceability and transparency within both traditional and commercial farming sectors; and (3)directly supporting the objectives of Qatar's National Food Security Strategy by enabling data-driven disease prevention and treatment.

[2] TASMU Smart Qatar is the national program launched by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) to drive Qatar's smart transformation across priority sectors using advanced technology and innovation.

Ms. AL-MARRI explained that the platform was intentionally designed for inclusivity, allowing traditional farmers and ezhabs to access services, request veterinary appointments, and download export health certificates via a mobile application. At the same time, commercial farms and private clinics can input vaccination data, receive automated alerts on outbreaks, and use analytics dashboards to monitor herd health and productivity. She added that this integrated ecosystem effectively forms a "digital highway" connecting rural farmers, service providers, and regulators within a unified national framework.

She further remarked that the TASMU solution represents a future-oriented model capable of being scaled and replicated across OIC Member Countries. By promoting digital inclusion, bridging service gaps, and integrating technology into traditional livelihoods, the project demonstrates that smart platforms can advance food security and empower rural communities simultaneously.

In conclusion, Ms. AL-MARRI asserted that Qatar's experience with the TASMU Livestock Monitoring Platform exemplifies how digital transformation can drive rural development, ensure resilience in agricultural systems, and create a connected ecosystem that benefits farmers, consumers, and the nation alike. She emphasized that this initiative provides a replicable model for other member states seeking to combine technological innovation with sustainable rural accessibility.

d. Uganda

Mr. Mukiibi Joseph KIWANUKA from the Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) explained that Uganda's rural accessibility remains a critical development challenge despite the country's economic growth and Vision 2040 agenda. He stated that Uganda's population stands at 45.9 million, with 75 percent living in rural areas, and that agriculture contributes 24 percent of GDP and serves as the main export earner. He also noted that accessibility gaps, such as poor roads, weak public transport, limited internet coverage, and insufficient housing, continue to limit productivity and inclusion.

Mr. KIWANUKA reported that Uganda's total road network covers 159,160 kilometers, of which 87 percent are District, Urban and Community Access Roads (DUCAR), and that over 60 percent of these roads are in poor condition or impassable during the rainy season. He added that current maintenance budgets cover only 26 percent of the required needs, resulting in a growing backlog and high lifecycle costs. He further explained that challenges such as inadequate funding, obsolete equipment, and high gravel costs are compounded by climate risks including floods, landslides, and dust.

Afterwards, he outlined that the government has adopted several interventions to enhance and sustain rural accessibility, including the use of Low-Cost Sealing (LCS) technology, which reduces travel time and increases road durability with a lifespan of around 12 years, as well as climate-resilient designs such as raised roads in swamp areas and steel or stone bridges. He stated that integrated transport planning now links the road sector with agriculture, education, and health to improve efficiency and safety by reducing blackspots on rural roads.

Mr. KIWANUKA continued his presentation by emphasizing that rural transformation requires more than roads—it also depends on complementary infrastructure and services such as public transport, internet connectivity, street lighting, and adequate housing. He also noted that addressing these interlinked challenges calls for a multi-sectoral approach involving the transport, ICT, energy, and housing sectors.

He further explained that Uganda's policy and institutional framework is guided by the Ministry of Works and Transport, which oversees DUCAR networks; the Parish Development Model (PDM), which supports last-mile economic transformation; and the national plans under Vision 2040 and NDP IV, which aim for a modern, safe, and climate-resilient transport system.

Following part of his presentation, Mr. KIWANUKA touched upon that the proposed Road Connectivity and Access Program (RCAP) seeks to diversify the rural economy and create jobs through infrastructure upgrades. The program includes upgrading 1,020 km of DUCAR roads, 153 km of town roads, and constructing 150 bridges and 50 culverts, while raising 50 km of swamp sections. It also aims to train 30 local contracting firms, generate over 1 million person-days of employment (with a focus on youth and women), and integrate ICT infrastructure, street lighting, and housing improvements.

Also, Mr. KIWANUKA highlighted that the expected results of these interventions include improved access to all-weather roads, better market linkages, higher rural incomes, strengthened local construction capacity, and enhanced access to education, health, and emergency services. He added that climate-resilient designs will reduce maintenance costs and increase safety on DUCAR roads.

In conclusion, he underlined that effective partnerships are essential for scaling up rural accessibility. Therefore, he stressed that Uganda needs support from development partners to bridge financing gaps, adopt global best practices in road asset management and climate resilience, and strengthen monitoring systems. He concluded that sustainable rural accessibility is not merely an infrastructure goal but a human development agenda that can unlock rural potential, diversify the economy, and create millions of jobs for Ugandans

6. Private Sector's/International Organizations' Perspectives

a. UNESCAP: "*Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility: UNESCAP's Experiences*"

Mr. Edouard CHONG, Economic Affairs Officer at the Transport Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), explained that ESCAP serves as one of the five regional commissions under the UN Economic and Social Council and functions as an intergovernmental platform for policy exchange, technical assistance, and capacity building across the Asia-Pacific region. He stated that the Transport Division works under three main thematic pillars—connectivity, logistics, and sustainable transport—and that its mandate includes the implementation of the Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway, and Dry Port Agreements to strengthen regional cooperation in transport development.

Mr. CHONG reported that ESCAP's work on rural transport highlights the fact that approximately 50 percent of the Asia-Pacific population depends on rural connectivity for livelihood and access to essential services. He noted that rural isolation remains a major barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in reducing poverty and improving access to education, healthcare, and employment. He added that the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the need for integration of digital and transport connectivity to enhance the socioeconomic resilience of rural communities.

He explained that ESCAP implemented a regional project titled "Digital and Transport Connectivity for Socioeconomic Resilience of Rural Communities in the Post-COVID-19 Period," targeting Bangladesh, Lao PDR, and Samoa. He also added that the project, jointly implemented with the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, aimed to strengthen the capacity of national policymakers to design innovative strategies that improve both physical access and digital inclusion in rural settings.

Mr. CHONG further outlined that the analytical studies conducted in the three countries revealed similar challenges: poor road infrastructure, fragmented multimodal networks, and limited institutional and digital capacity. He stated that over 40 percent of Bangladesh's rural roads remain unpaved and seasonally inaccessible, while Lao PDR has 76 percent of its rural roads unpaved, often damaged by floods and landslides. In Samoa, he noted that inter-island aviation and maritime infrastructure are limited, leaving many communities dependent on buses and small ferries for mobility.

He highlighted that ESCAP's recommended strategies include upgrading climate-resilient and all-weather roads, improving multimodal connectivity between road, water, and rail networks, and enhancing digital and institutional capacity through real-time monitoring and integrated transport planning. He also emphasized that policy and planning frameworks should incorporate climate resilience, gender equality, and community participation to ensure inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Afterwards, Mr. CHONG illustrated that before-and-after project examples, such as the Yousufpur UPC Road in Bangladesh, demonstrate how targeted upgrades can transform community access, reduce travel time, and stimulate local economic activity. He noted that partnerships with development agencies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank have been crucial in financing and scaling up such interventions in both Lao PDR and Samoa.

Lastly, Mr. CHONG stressed that ESCAP continues to promote collective regional action through new initiatives such as the Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (2024–2034), which aims to strengthen operational connectivity along the Asian Highway Network and promote environmentally sustainable transport corridors. He concluded that rural connectivity is not merely an infrastructure issue but a multidimensional development priority, linking transport, digital access, and social resilience across the Asia-Pacific region.

7. COMCEC Project Support Programs

Mr. Muhammed Ziya SARI, Assistant Expert at the COMCEC Coordination Office, delivered a presentation on the COMCEC Project Funding (CPF) and COMCEC Al-Quds Program.

Regarding the COMCEC Al-Quds Program, Mr. SARI said that it has been initiated based on the decisions taken in the previous COMCEC Ministerial Meetings as well as Extraordinary Islamic Summits. The program is carried on in cooperation with the Palestinian authorities, and this program aims at improving the capacity of Al-Quds considering the specific economic needs of the region as well as the institutional and human capacity of the relevant stakeholders. The program mainly focuses on tourism, cultural heritage, destination development, entrepreneurship, creating job opportunities and empowerment of women and youth and it also consists of several interrelated projects that will be executed in the following years.
Then, he provided some details regarding the COMCEC Project Funding and highlighted that the COMCEC Project Funding is a grant-based financing mechanism introduced by COMCEC Coordination Office in 2014 as a policy support instrument under the COMCEC Strategy. The main purpose is to enhance cooperation and solidarity among the member countries, support the implementation of policy recommendations adopted by COMCEC Ministerial Sessions, and increase institutional and human capacity. Mainly activity-based projects are supported under this program. These projects include the activities such as training, seminar, workshop, peer-to-peer experience sharing, needs assessment, study visit, publicity meetings, etc.

He continued his presentation with the implementation statistics, both yearly and on a sectoral basis, for the last 10 years. He also gave the details of the contents and activities of the Transport and Communications projects implemented so far.

Lastly, he gave general information about the relevant pages of the COMCEC Project Funding website and mentioned the timeline for the project submission. He indicated the relevant reference materials in the Online Project Submission System to be used during the project submission period.

8. Policy Debate Session on the Guide "Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries" and Policy Recommendations

Mr. Mehran KHAMISIZADEH, Deputy Director General from the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development of Iran, COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) Focal Point of Iran, moderated the roundtable session.

At the outset, Dr. Akif FİDANOĞLU delivered a presentation on the Policy Guide including guiding principles and recommended practices with respect to enhancing and sustaining rural accessibility. Afterwards, he mentioned the importance of effective rural transport planning in the OIC Member Countries.

Then, Dr. FİDANOĞLU introduced the Draft Policy Recommendations and their rationalities, which was circulated by the COMCEC Coordination Office prior to the Meeting.

After thorough discussions and comprehensive deliberations, the Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations[3] to be submitted to the 41st Ministerial Session of the COMCEC for ad consideration and adoption of the Honorable Ministers.

- **Policy Recommendation I:** Developing a long-term national strategy institutionalizing cross-sector coordination and multi-level governance for transport investments to increase rural accessibility with a view of socio-economic development.
- **Policy Recommendation II:** Integrating rural connectivity targets (i.e all-weather road access, market access, public transport coverage) into national transport policies and sector plans by ensuring balanced infrastructure development, high-level commitment and fostering cross-sectoral support.
- **Policy Recommendation III:** Utilizing data-driven mapping and decision-support tools to identify needs and gaps for evidence-based rural accessibility planning to prioritize investments based on socio-economic impact analysis.
- **Policy Recommendation IV:** Introducing dedicated funding streams and cost-sharing models through leveraging alternative mechanisms such as public-private partnerships or community contributions to enhance rural accessibility.
- **Policy Recommendation V:** Promoting sustainable operational monitoring and maintenance by introducing effective feedback channels based on social inclusion and service delivery metrics, alongside infrastructure monitoring to support continuous rural development.

[3] The Room Document is attached as Annex 3.

Closing Remarks

The Meeting ended with closing remarks of Mr. Mehmet Celalettin AKTAŞ, Director at the COMCEC Coordination Office. He initially summarized salient points highlighted during the Meeting by underlining the contributions of the Member Countries, the international instutions and the relevant OIC instutions.

Mr. AKTAŞ pointed out that there is a great potential to achieve rural transport planning for having better conditions. Furthermore, he stated that these discussions and presentations during the Meeting would be fruitful in terms of experience sharing.

Afterwards, he thanked all the participants for their attendance and contributions. He encouraged the Member Countries to share their views, comments, and critiques, if any, about the Guidebook Report via e-mail to the Secretariat.

Mr. Mehran KHAMISIZADEH, the Chair of the Meeting, also thanked all the participants for their participatory attitudes and contributions.

Annex 1: Agenda of the Meeting

AGENDA

OF THE 25TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP

(17-18 September 2025, Ankara)

"Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries"

1. Opening Remarks

2. "Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries": Scope, Conceptual Framework and Methodology

3. Lessons Learned from the Selected Case Studies

4. Experiences/Perspectives of the Member Countries, International Institutions and Private Sector

5. COMCEC Project Support Programs

6. Policy Debate Session: Formulation of Policy Recommendations for the 41st COMCEC Ministerial Session

7. Closing Remarks

Annex 2: Program of the Meeting

PROGRAM OF THE MEETING
25TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP
(17-18 September 2025, Ankara)

"Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries"

September 17th, 2025

08:30-09:00 **Registration**

09:00-09:05 **Recitation from the Holy Qur'an**

09:05-09:20 **Opening Remarks**

09:20-09:40 **Outlook of Transport and Communications in the OIC Member Countries**
- *Presentation: Ms. Betül ÖZAL KARAHAN*
  Working Group Coordinator
  COMCEC Coordination Office

09:40-09:50 Discussion

09:50-10:30 **Presentation of the Draft Research Report**
- *Presentation: Dr. Akif FİDANOĞLU*
  Consultant
  Hisartech Consultancy

10:30-10:45 Discussion

10:45-11:00 **Coffee Break**

11:00-11:45 **Main Findings of the Selected Case Country Analysis and the Lessons Learnt**
- *Presentation: Dr. Akif FİDANOĞLU*
  Consultant
  Hisartech Consultancy

11:45-12:00 Discussion

12:00-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:00 Experiences/Perspectives of the Member Countries

- *Egypt*
- *Iraq*
- *Qatar*
- *Uganda*

Discussion

15:00-15:15 Coffee Break

15:15-15:45 Experiences/Perspectives of International Institutions

Presentation: "Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility: UNESCAP's Experiences"
by Mr. Edouard CHONG
Economic Affairs Officer
United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

Discussion

15:45-16:30 Utilizing the COMCEC Project Support Programs
Presentation: Mr. Muhammet Ziya SARI
COMCEC Coordination Office

Discussion

September 18th, 2023

09:30 – 11:45 Policy Debate Session: Formulation of Policy Recommendations on *"Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries"* to be submitted for the 41st COMCEC Ministerial Session

A policy debate session will be held to come up with a set of policy recommendations to address enhancing and sustaining rural accessibility in the Member Countries.

Discussion

11:45 – 12:00 **Closing Remarks and Family Photo**

12:00 – 14:00 **Lunch**

Annex 3: The Policy Recommendations of the 25th Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 25TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group (TCWG) succesfully held its its 25th Meeting with the theme “Enhancing and Sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries”. In the Policy Debate Session titled as “Formulation of Policy Recommendations for the 41st COMCEC Ministerial Session on Enhancing and sustaining Rural Accessibility in the OIC Member Countries”, on 18 September 2025, TCWG made deliberations on the policy recommendations related to enhancing and sustaining rural accessibility. The policy recommendations were formulated by taking into consideration the policy guide with the same theme of the above-mentioned meeting. The policy recommendations are as followings:

Policy Recommendation I: Developing a long-term national strategy institutionalizing cross-sector coordination and multi-level governance for transport investments to increase rural accessibility with a view of socio-economic development.

Policy Recommendation II: Integrating rural connectivity targets (i.e all-weather road access, market access, public transport coverage) into national transport policies and sector plans by ensuring balanced infrastructure development, high-level commitment and fostering cross-sectoral support.

Policy Recommendation III: Utilizing data-driven mapping and decision-support tools to identify needs and gaps for evidence-based rural accessibility planning to prioritize investments based on socio-economic impact analysis.

Policy Recommendation IV: Introducing dedicated funding streams and cost-sharing models through leveraging alternative mechanisms such as public-private partnerships or community contributions to enhance rural accessibility.

Policy Recommendation V: Promoting sustainable operational monitoring and maintenance by introducing effective feedback channels based on social inclusion and service delivery metrics, alongside infrastructure monitoring to support continuous rural development.

Annex 4 : List of Participants

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

25th Meeting of the COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

(17-18 September 2025 Ankara)

A. MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE OIC

REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

- Mr. SULIDDIN MAMMADOV

Advisor, Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Ankara

BURKINA FASO

- Mr. BANGAGNE HALIDOU

Head of Department, Ministry of Infrastructure and Landlocked Development

- Mr. BARRY INOUSSA

Head of Department, Ministry of Infrastructure and Landlocked Development

REPUBLIC OF CHAD

- Mr. ABDELRAHIM HASSABALLAH DJIBRINE

Director, Ministry of Transport, Civil Aviation and National Meteorology

- Mr. MOUSTAPHA NOUR MAHAMAT

Focal Point, Minister of Transports of Chad

REPUBLIC OF COTE D'IVOIRE

- Mr. TOURE ABDOULAYE

Director General, Mınıstry of Transport

ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

- Mr. AHMED ABDELSATTAR

International Relations Researcher, Ministry of Communications and Informatıon Technology

- Mr. HANY ABDALLAH ELTATAWY

Expert, Country

REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

- Mr. BANNIE TAIWO CHAPMAN

Head of Department, National Roads Authority, the Gambia.

- Mr. SAIKOU KUJABI

Officer, Ministry of Transport Works and Infrastructure

REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

- Mr. MUHAMMAD FARID ARDIANSYAH

International Cooperation Officer, Ministry of Transportation

- Ms. IRLY SARITINI PERMATA

Deputy Director of Scheduled Road Transport, Ministry of Transportation

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

- Mr. MEHRAN KHAMISIZADEH

Deputy Director General, MRUD

REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

- Mr. SALIM ALDARRAJI

Head of Department, State Company for Land Transport

- Ms. HAIFAA NAJIM

Head of Department, Ministry of Transport

- Ms. LANA ALNASERI

Head of Department, Ministry of Transportation

HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

- Ms. LUBNA ABDALHADI

Head of Department, Land Transport Regulatory Commission Jordan

- Ms. SAWSAN SHABSOUGH

Researcher, Ministry of Transport

MALAYSIA

- Mr. MOHAMAD FARID MOHD ARIS

Officer, Ministry of Transport Malaysia

- Ms. AINI RISLAH MD RAMLI

Officer, Ministry of Transport Malaysia

KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

- Mr. SALLOUHI JAAFAR

Head of Department, Moroccan Ministry of Transport and Logistics

- Mr. ELMEKKAOUY ABDELAADIM

Counsellor, Ministry of Transport and Logistics

REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

- Mr. PAULO RICARDO

CEO, Development Fund of Transport and Communications of Mozambique

- Ms. RUBINA NORMAHOMED

Director, National Roads Administration

SULTANATE OF OMAN

- Dr. SAIF ALSINANI

Director General, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

- Mr. MOHAMMED TABOUK

Director, Ministry of Transport, Communications & IT

STATE OF QATAR

- Ms. MARYAM ALNESAIRI

International Cooperation Researcher - Focal Point, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology Qatar

- Ms. SHAIKHA ALMARRI

Analyst, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology

- Mr. HUSSAIN SALATT

Head of Department, CRA

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

- Mr. RUGIAH ALZAMIA

Director, Ministry of Transport and Logistics

REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

- Mr. FERHAT BALCI

Expert, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure

REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

- Mr. KATUSHABE WINSTONE

Head of Department, Ministry of Works and Transport

- Mr. JOSEPH MUKIIBI KIWANUKA

Commissioner, Ministry of Works and Transport

B. THE OIC SUBSIDIARY ORGANS

STATISTICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER FOR

ISLAMIC COUNTRIES (SESRIC)

- Ms. TIBYAN NADIR

Assistant Technical Cooperation Officer

C. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (UN ESCAP)

- Mr. EDOUARD CHONG

Economic Affairs Officer, UN ESCAP

D. COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

- Mr. SELÇUK KOÇ

Director General

- Mr. GÜRKAN POLAT

Director

- MEHMET C. AKTAŞ

Director

- Mr. MEHMET ASLAN

Director

- Dr. AKİF FİDANOĞLU

Consultant, Hisartech Consultancy

- Ms. ÖZGÜL YÜKSEL

Head Coordinator

- Ms. BETÜL ÖZAL KARAHAN

Working Group Coordinator

- Mr. AŞKIN ÇETİNKAYA

Expert

- Mr. MERT CAN SELVER

Expert

- Mr. SELİM UYAR

Translator

- Ms. HANDE ÖZDEMİR

Officer

- Mr. MUHARREM TEMLİSU

Secretary

- Ms. YELİZ DURAN

Secretary