

The Role and Contribution of OIC in the Development of Educational and Scientific Facilities in the Muslim World

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1. Introduction

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) formerly the Organization of Islamic Conference has the power and influence in development of education and growth of scientific research and development facilities throughout the Muslim World. Most of the Muslim countries, due to the rapid increase in population, need to develop infrastructure to keep up with its population growth. The economies of these Muslim countries are also digressing into a chaotic mess. This article presents the advancement in terms of policy planning and goal setting done by the OIC in last decades for the education and scientific development of the Muslim Countries and provides an evaluation on the current status of the policies implementation

Education and scientific development of the Muslim Countries is important as they have a large number of raw young population. If this large population is not turned into meaningful human resource it can be used by the negative elements in sabotaging world peace as well as they will become a burden on world economy in next few decades on the other hand, if this human resource is educated, trained and enlightened by providing the resources of higher institutes of learning and scientific facilities they can help transform the Muslim countries into peaceful and stable economies of the world.

2. History of OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was founded in 1969 as an organization to safeguard the interests of the Muslim Countries, its membership has always been comprised of Muslim Member States however today it also includes a few non-Muslim countries with high Muslim population as observers. There are 57 countries which are full member of OIC. It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations and is also its largest voting bloc on the Security Council. [1] On the contrast European Union has only 28 member countries. OIC boasts the same following as UNO and has helped formulate policy as well as magistrate across branches of government to encourage cooperation between Muslim nations and Western Nations. It is important to note that member states of the OIC include most of the countries in northern Africa, all of Russia, the Slavic States, as well as countries of Southeast Asia. Hence the effective policies of OIC can impact about 1 billion people of the world. This is pretty significant. OIC can leverage this power to impact the availability of a free and compulsory education throughout its Member States.

Since 2008, USA appoints a Special Envoy (Ambassador) to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. OIC also appoints members to the United Nations. The European Union and the United States who both have permanent seats in the OIC has a minimal role in the policy making. These seats can positively influence educational and scientific partnerships in the OIC member countries for the betterment of the world. It is important to note that one of the fundamental goals of the OIC has been to create a policy that can create harmony between the Muslim member countries and the Western Countries.

3. Structure of OIC

The OIC is organized in a similar fashion as the United Nations. Member States nominate and then vote on who becomes the Secretary General. In February of 2013, Mr. Iyad Amin Madani was nominated by Saudi Arabia and became Secretary General effective January 2014.

The OIC helps connects its Member States with opportunities to participate in educational and scientific seminars and symposiums and long running programs. There are several sub-organizations within the OIC such as ISESCO, IAS, STIO and others however the information presented on the OIC website seemed disorganized and hence some detail about the various sub-organization of OIC particularly responsible for the education and scientific development is expanded for the edification of the readers.

4. Educational and Scientific Organizations

a) Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IESCO)

The **IESCO** was established by OIC to secure universal access to education, achieve quality education and develop higher education competitiveness among its member States. IESCO responsibilities are as follows:

- It organizes regular meetings on the education with its Member States
- Holds special conferences and symposiums to create innovation among the students
- It issues prizes for students and schools that meet its rigorous requirements
- It delivers special training for women in the field of management and training on product processing and grain and other business areas specific to women.

According to *The Three Year Action Plan* and Budget for the Years 2013 to 2015 IESCO focused on education, science, culture and communication. This was directly in line with its first objective to interact positively with global challenges, both regional and international. IESCO wanted to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set for by the United Nations. The MDGs that IESCO tried to establish was to ensure universal access to basic education, achieve quality education and develop higher education competition. In regards to Science, IESCO sought to edit science policies and governance, reinforce technology capacities and create a comprehensive science education for all Member States. Within this frame, IESCO wanted to conserve and utilize natural resources, mitigate environment risk and disaster management.

b) Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS)

The Islamic University of Technology is a subsidiary organ of the OIC. It provides scholarships and training for undergraduate and postgraduate students who are focused on engineering, computer science, information and teacher training. The IAS provides instruction in technology, science and engineering, technical and vocational education in fields that are offered in Member States. These classes provide an opportunity for students in Member States to gain knowledge of technical skills.

c) The Science, Technology and Innovation Organization (STIO)

The Science, Technology and Innovation Organization (STIO) facilitates coordination between Member States to incorporate science, technology and innovation. The STIO facilitates competitions in order to increase competence of innovation.

Some of the other specialized research centers under the OIC direction are as follows:

- A. **Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESERIC):** it maintains databases that include statistics, research, training and technical co-operation.
- B. **The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA):** A focal point for Islamic culture that establishes research, publishing services and organizes conferences and symposiums
- C. **The Islamic Centre for the Development of Trade (ICDT):** It promotes trade exchange between Member States
- D. **The Islamic Centre Fiqh Academy:** It helps strengthen the Muslim community with the Islamic faith
- E. **The Executive Bureau of the Islamic Solidarity Fund:** Its goal is to increase academic standards
- F. **Science Development Network:** The Science Development Network addresses the needs to achieve higher levels of development and prosperity while increasing literacy and secure higher standards of education for OIC Member States. The Network believed it to be essential for Member States to demonstrate a strong political will in establishing and implementing procedures to tackle the proponents of increasing infrastructure for education and science. [5]

5. Challenges faced by OIC and its member states

The Islamic Voice reported in March 2015 that 40 % of Muslim world is uneducated, on the contrast only 26% of the world is uneducated.[2] This figure even includes the Muslim population who are educated but cannot make civil decisions and are not trained in skillful professions. The situation for women education is even worse. There are an estimated 122 million Muslim youth globally are illiterate, of which young women represent 60.7%. [3]

OIC Member States have enough financial and human resources combined together to change the destiny of 1 billion people of the world by empowering them with education and helping governments construct supportive infrastructure to provide educational and scientific facilities. It is disheartening to find out that there are approximately 600 universities in the Member States which means there is only one university for every two million Muslims. [4]

OIC has correctly identified this issue, “despite being an important strength of the OIC Member States, [the] young population faces considerable challenges in the social and economic life in a significant number of member countries. Inadequate education and lack of required skills make it especially difficult for youth in finding jobs in the labor market.”[6] It is evident from this statement that OIC takes its view of education very seriously however it does little to establish a wider academic market. It is a possibility that some of the member states are so much tied up in their domestic politics and border conflicts that they don’t have enough time, resources and critical mass dedicated to solving this bigger and imminent problem. Henceforth OIC is in perfect position to positively lead the world’s Muslim population to lead successful and better lives. Funding countries need for infrastructure, holding workshops on transparency and educating people on the importance of getting higher degrees should be the goals of the OIC but there is no action to be accounted.

6. OIC Policies and Plans for education and Scientific development (Ten Year Program)

In 2006 the OIC launched its first Ten Year Program [8] which was to uphold the transparency and accountability in governance and protection for women, children and minorities. This program promised to promote sustainable development and assist the least developed states in tackling diseases such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. This ten point program was to connect international agencies with existing development initiatives to bring greater understanding to theological issues and confront ideologies that claim to be Islamic in order to justify extremism.

A. First Ten Year Program (2005 - 2014)

Here is a summary of the goals set in the First ten year program. [7] [11]

1. Improve and reform educational institutions and curricula in all levels with special emphasis given to science and technology to strive for quality education that promotes creativity, innovation, and research and development
2. Establish infrastructure to increase the number of Muslim professionals in Member States.
3. Entrust the General Secretariat to study the creation of an OIC Award for Outstanding Scientific Achievements by Muslim scientists.
4. Encourage member states to establish and increase research and development programmes.
5. Close the digital gap between the developed and developing States and request the General Secretariat to follow up these results in order to build the capacities of Member States to adhere to the information society which, in turn, will sustain development in Muslim States.
6. Encourage public and private national research institutions to invest in technology capacity-building and in areas of advanced technologies.

7. Review the performance of the OIC-affiliated universities so as to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.
8. Call upon the Member States to extend enhanced support to the Islamic University of Technology in Bangladesh.
9. Urge the IDB to further enhance its programme of scholarships for outstanding students and Hi-Tech specializations aimed at developing the scientific, technical, and research capabilities of scientists and researchers in the Member States.

At the 41st session in June of 2014, the Council of Foreign Ministers tasked the OIC Secretary-General with convening an Inter-Governmental Expert Group Meeting to review and evaluate the implementation of the first ten year program of action and to draft a new OIC program of action from 2016 to 2025. It was also decided that this new 2nd ten year plan should continue as a guide for maintaining human rights and member states of the OIC should help to secure the image of the OIC on a global scale. As this image improves internal bureaucracy and organizational processes it gains the confidence of Member States.

B. Second Ten Year Plan (2015 to 2025)

The 2nd Ten Year Plan is drawn between the following two aspects

- Intellectual and political goals
- Development, socio-economic and scientific goals

The second issue of development, socio-economic and scientific are of greater interest for this article. The policies that comprise this section that we would like to focus on are the sectors of Higher education, science and technology. The goals set are almost the same as the 1st ten year plan.

The Higher Education, Science and Technology component of the 2nd Ten year program has nine goals.

1. Effectively improve and reform educational institutions and curriculum at all levels
2. Prevent brain migration by providing opportunities for highly-qualified Muslims.
3. Trust the General Secretariat to create an OIC Award for Outstanding Scientific Achievements by Muslim scientists.
4. Call upon Islamic countries to encourage research and development programs.
5. Take advantage of the call for Muslims to openly engage in closing the digital gap between developed and developing Member States.
6. Encourage public and private national research institutions to invest in technology capacity building.
7. Review efficiency and effectiveness of OIC Member State universities.
8. Urge Member States to fund the Islamic University of Technology in Bangladesh of the OIC.
9. Urge the Islamic Development Bank to increase funding for scholarships for outstanding students and Hi-Tech specializations that are aimed at developing the scientific, technical and research capabilities of scientists and researchers in Member states.

Even though the two ten year plans of the OIC are similar in wording,[12] they indicate the intense and powerful need for this infrastructure that OIC members are struggling to implement. This struggle isn't one of weakness but of moving Member States to inexhaustibly utilize their resources to increase movement towards free and compulsory education for all. The time has arrived to critically evaluate the performance of the first 10 year plan and set strict deadlines, concrete deliverables and continuous follow ups to ensure that the second 10 year plan doesn't do as miserably as the first one.

ISESCO, an OIC organization, had a three-year action plan for 2013 to 2015 that addressed two main agenda items. The first was to support the efforts of Member States to achieve sustainable development and the second pertained to providing correct information about Islam and Muslims and address Islamophobia. While the second was equally important, education should be the primary focus of

ISESCO yet general affirmations that lack action are included in the three-year plan. I was unable to find if ISESCO has implemented the various conferences and symposiums on a regular basis. It has an elaborate website however there are no action items listed.

In January 2015, the OIC held a round table regarding cooperation and coordination of humanitarian action. [5] The author believe that humanitarian action also includes providing support to countries that are in need of solid, working health and academic programs which help people learn about their talents that in turns leads to an increase in thriving communities and a secure socioeconomic status for all countries.

The political plans and ambitions of the OIC are very important but it is also important to focus on building opportunities in health and education in developing countries such as Pakistan and Nigeria who need the support to increase infrastructure. At OIC strategic vs. tactical thinking is amiss. Muslim countries like Pakistan and Nigeria have the human resources but lack financial support from other Muslim countries and the OIC. When the funds are provided these are not utilized properly for the Human Development hence a tighter control on how the funds are utilized must be a key focus. These funds come from sources such as the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) which gives loans and grants depending on the need and type. The IDB acts much like the World Bank in that it is heavily invested in contributing to the educational and scientific facilities in “creating greater awareness of several innovative projects invented by the IDB Member Countries using local resources”. [9]The OIC need to make concrete efforts to point Muslim countries towards accomplishing grand health and education schemes which is depicted in their declaration:

“significant policy-measures need to be applied to effectively reduce the gender gap among men and women (in terms of access to education) to a standard 2% level by 2025”. [7] They need to be strong in their stand towards increasing learning opportunities for all people yet they believe that education reform should be in the form of promoting “culture of tolerance and understanding”.

- This means educating those who don't understand the importance of education.
- This means teaching people basic health care.
- This means that more communities will gather together and grow both personally but professionally.

It is easily seen that the OIC takes these three tasks to heart and has laid out action items to help them reach their goal of complete free, equitable and quality primary, secondary, and tertiary education. But this goal cannot be met without the OIC first accomplishing action items set in the Ten year plans. Meetings and seminars are without action are not going to fix the issues. They need to act while there is still time in lobbying Member States on a consistent and determined basis to increase academic and employment creating infrastructure. Once it gains a foothold in this arena, it can help Member States scale back on the funding they received from the World Bank and other entities such as the UK and the United States. It must work right now to secure education for the entire Muslim world and the only way it can do this proactively is through action. Meetings and symposiums spend money that could go towards securing education for all people in the Member States. Use it wisely and watch the empire grow in faith and security.

7. Conclusion

Muslim Countries have so much hidden talent. They have vast amount of natural resources, enormous young, energetic population, and strong financial resources and yet the desire to use these resources for the betterment of the 1 billion people is missing .hence it is important to help the member countries grow by encouraging their leaders to stand fast to their educational policies that they create. This is possible by bringing in motivated and intellectuals on the OIC platform and not just the political personalities. When leaders will follow through with the policies they have created, this positive direction will secure a prosperous future for the member countries of the OIC. All we need is for the OIC to rise and speak confidently with optimism.

It is always easy to rely on humanitarian effort from richer nations, which is an extremely wonderful act of philanthropy, but truly more effort must be exerted towards securing health care and education and utilizing in-house resources. Once people start to learn more about themselves and others, humanitarian aid will not be needed in such increasing amounts as it is today. OIC needs to help build up Muslim countries by helping the governments understand this importance. Only then can Muslim countries grow socially and economically. The OIC needs to assert to the other Muslim governments that they need

to spend 4% of the GDP as indicated by UN in its Education for ALL manifesto [10] to build schools and enrollment. This can be done and accomplished but first OIC needs to connect with political and community leaders to provide a framework that doesn't allow for intrigue or financial and political corruption.

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