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Catalysts for Food Systems  
Transformation in OIC Countries  
- Insights from the Islamic  
Development Bank

Bridging Quality and  
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From Margins to  
Markets: How Rural  
Women and Youth Are  
Transforming OIC Food  
Systems

A Season  
of Partnership  
and Practical  
Engagement



المنظمة الإسلامية للأمن الغذائي  
Islamic Organisation for Food Security  
l'Organisation Islamique pour la Sécurité Alimentaire



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# FOOD SECURITY HUB



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**Dear Readers,**

**A**s we begin the first quarter of 2026, global food systems continue to navigate a period of uncertainty. While global agricultural production has shown resilience in recent seasons, the combined pressures of climate change, geopolitical tensions, market volatility, and supply chain disruptions continue to shape the food security outlook across many regions.

For the Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), these challenges remain particularly significant. Agriculture plays a central role in livelihoods, rural employment, and economic stability across much of the OIC region. At the same time, structural vulnerabilities, ranging from climate stress and water scarcity to trade disruptions and plant health risks, underscore the need for stronger cooperation, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

This edition of the Food Security Hub brings together a range of perspectives on the evolving dynamics of food systems across the OIC region. The contributions examine the role of women and youth in agricultural transformation, the importance of standards and quality infrastructure for resilient food trade, and the growing significance of plant health

and biosecurity in safeguarding staple crops. Together, these insights highlight the importance of inclusive policies, scientific collaboration, and practical investments in strengthening food systems.

In addition, this issue introduces the IOFS Food Security Update for the first quarter of 2026, which provides an overview of recent global and regional developments affecting food security. The update highlights current trends in global food prices, cereal supply and demand, and evolving risks across OIC Member States, including humanitarian crises, climate pressures, and disruptions in trade and supply chains.

As the specialized institution of the OIC dedicated to advancing sustainable food security, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS) continues to support Member States through research cooperation, capacity-building, and joint initiatives aimed at strengthening agricultural resilience and improving food system sustainability.

We hope that this issue of the Food Security Hub contributes to informed discussion and continued cooperation across the OIC community as we work toward more resilient and sustainable food systems.

**Ambassador Khusrav Noziri**

*Assistant Director General,  
Islamic Organisation  
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# RURAL WOMEN AND YOUTH AS CATALYSTS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION IN OIC COUNTRIES - INSIGHTS FROM THE ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains central to the economies, identities, and livelihoods of OIC Member Countries (MCs). It contributes an average of 10.4% of GDP, which is more than twice the global average of 4.3%, and it exceeds 25% GDP in several MCs. Agriculture also remains a major source of employment, engaging about 216 million people, equivalent to 32% of their total employment (SESRIC, 2023). About 46% of the population in MCs lives in rural areas (SESRIC, 2025a), relying heavily on agriculture for income, food security, and resilience.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), 24 of the world's 44 Low-Income Food Deficit Countries are OIC MCs, underscoring the depth of vulnerability across the MCs. Agricultural performance has shown notable dynamism, growing by 13.2% since 2016, outpacing both non-OIC developing countries and the global average (SESRIC, 2023). However, recent shocks have exposed the fragility of these gains. Climate change, water scarcity, conflict, market volatility, and the aftermath effects of COVID-19 have disrupted food systems, disproportionately affecting rural communities, women, and youth. While the pandemic revealed global fragility, but also the interconnected nature of our world (UNSDG, 2020), the Russia–Ukraine conflict triggered sharp increases in food prices (WEF, 2022).

**Women and youth occupy essential roles across food systems. Women contribute significantly to agricultural labour and play key roles in production, processing, marketing, and household nutrition.** Rural women account for about 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, yet they consistently have less access to land, finance, inputs, training, and technology than men (IFAD, 2022). Youth in agrifood systems face persistent and interconnected challenges, including limited access to land, finance, technology, and extension services, driven by structural, legal, and gender-based constraints. Barriers to quality education, skills development, and vocational training, especially in rural areas, contribute to skills mismatches and high rates of youth **not in education, employment, or training** (FAO, 2025).

## 2. ISDB AND THE STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

**Across its strategic and sectoral policies, the IsDB prioritizes expanding the leadership, skills, and economic participation of rural women and youth as a pathway to stronger, more resilient food systems.** The IsDB recognizes that strengthening food systems goes beyond increasing production alone; it requires a deliberate shift toward inclusive, resilient, and people-centered approaches that place human potential at the core of transformation. Rural women and youth, who are deeply embedded across agricultural value chains as farmers, processors, traders, and entrepreneurs, are no longer viewed as passive beneficiaries of development interventions. Instead, they are increasingly recognized as leaders, innovators, and agents of change whose knowledge, energy, and resilience are essential to building food systems that are productive, equitable, and sustainable.

**The IsDB Group's 10-Year Strategic Framework, 2026–2035 (IsDB Group, 2025)** positions women and youth as central to achieving inclusive productivity, sustained growth, and long-term resilience across MCs. The Framework explicitly emphasizes that sustained economic transformation depends on integrating people, particularly women and youth, into productivity, through access to decent jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities, skills development, and financial inclusion. Rather than treating women and youth as vulnerable groups alone, the Strategy frames their inclusion as a core economic imperative for broad-based development and poverty reduction.

The 10-Year Strategic Framework highlights that inclusive productivity growth requires empowering women and youth with market-relevant education, skills, and pathways to employment, ensuring that human capital investments translate into real labor-market outcomes. It underscores youth employment and entrepreneurship as essential for competitiveness and resilience, particularly in economies facing demographic pressures and high unemployment. Similarly, women's economic participation is identified as critical to expanding productive capacity, strengthening MSMEs, and improving household and community wellbeing.

### 3. EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN AS LEADERS IN FOOD SYSTEMS

The Women's Empowerment Policy provides a comprehensive framework for addressing structural barriers to women's economic participation. In food systems, IsDB-supported interventions focus on improving women's access to productive assets, climate-smart technologies, Shari'ah-compliant finance, market opportunities, and vocational and technical training. Investments in enabling infrastructure, such as water supply, renewable energy, transport, and digital connectivity help reduce time

poverty and mobility constraints that disproportionately affect rural women.

By mainstreaming gender considerations across agricultural and rural development operations, the Bank ensures that women can participate meaningfully along value chains and capture greater economic value. A practical example is the **Empowering West African Women Small and Medium Enterprises (EWASME) program, being implemented in Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone (We-Fi & IsDB, 2020)**. EWASME strengthens women-owned SMEs in the rice value chain through capacity development, matching grants, and policy dialogue. By supporting women-led agribusinesses, the program enhances income generation, value-chain resilience, and regional food security.



### 4. YOUTH AS CATALYSTS FOR MODERN AND RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

According to the OIC Labour Market Report (SESRIC, 2025b), an estimated 26.3% of youth in OIC MCs are **not in employment, education, or training**, compared to 19.2% in non-OIC developing countries and 9.7% in developed countries. The IsDB has embarked on various initiatives to position the youth as leaders of food systems transformation.

The IsDB's **Vocational Training School for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries in Bouna (Côte d'Ivoire)** and the **Development of the Vocational Education System under the Reverse Linkage mechanism in Guinea-Bissau** contribute to food systems strengthening and food security by addressing a core structural constraint, which is the inadequate human and institutional capacity across agri-food value chains. Both interventions strengthen food systems through skills development, institutional reform, and labor market alignment. The Bouna project directly builds a localized pipeline of skilled youth for agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, linking vocational training with farm practice, agribusiness incubation, and rural employment, thereby improving productivity, reducing post-harvest losses, and stabilizing local food supply.

The Guinea-Bissau project is strengthening national TVET systems through South–South cooperation, enabling the country to sustainably produce skilled technicians for priority agricultural and agro-processing value chains. Together, the projects enhance food availability and access by improving productivity and incomes, strengthen system resilience by anchoring youth employment in rural economies, and support long-term food security by institutionalizing skills development within national food system governance.



## 5. INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AND A SHARED VISION FOR FOOD SYSTEMS



Transforming food systems requires coordinated action across sectors, institutions, and borders. The IsDB collaborates with national governments, the private sector, civil society, and OIC

institutions to scale impact. Partnerships enable joint programming, shared analytics, harmonized standards, and coordinated capacity building. The IsDB Group 10-Year Strategic Framework (2026-2035) provides a unified platform for aligning country-level interventions with regional and global food security agendas. By integrating women's empowerment, youth development, climate resilience, and value-chain transformation into a single institutional vision, the IsDB positions itself as a convenor and catalyst for inclusive food system transformation across the OIC.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- Rural women and youth are the decisive force behind food system transformation, and investing in their leadership delivers a high return for resilience and productivity.
- IsDB is enabling women and youth to act as leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators across agrifood value chains by addressing structural constraints, such as limited access to skills, finance, markets, and productive assets.
- IsDB interventions shows that empowering rural women and youth is not only a social imperative but a strategic driver of productivity, resilience, food security, and nation building.
- Coordinated action across governments, private sector, and OIC institutions is essential to building food systems that are resilient to shocks, responsive to demographic change, and capable of delivering inclusive growth and long-term food security across the OIC MCs.

## EN SUMMARY

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of livelihoods, employment, and food security across Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Member Countries, where rural areas host nearly half of the population and agriculture employs over 200 million people. Despite recent gains in agricultural performance, food systems in OIC countries remain highly vulnerable to climate change, conflict, market volatility, and global shocks, with rural women and youth disproportionately affected. At the same time, these groups represent a largely untapped force for food system transformation.

This article examines how rural women and youth act as catalysts for inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems in OIC countries, drawing on strategic priorities and operational experience of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). It highlights the structural constraints facing women and youth in agrifood systems, par-

ticularly limited access to land, finance, skills, and markets, while demonstrating how targeted investments can unlock productivity, employment, and resilience gains. Anchored in the IsDB Group's 10-Year Strategic Framework (2026–2035), the paper illustrates how empowering women and youth as leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators strengthens value chains, enhances food security, and supports poverty reduction.

Through selected programmatic examples, including women-led agribusiness support and youth-focused skills development initiatives, the article underscores that investing in rural women and youth is not only a social imperative but a strategic economic choice. It concludes that coordinated, people-centered approaches are essential to building food systems capable of delivering inclusive growth and long-term resilience across OIC Member Countries.

## FR RÉSUMÉ

L'agriculture demeure un pilier des moyens de subsistance, de l'emploi et de la sécurité alimentaire dans les pays membres de l'Organisation de la coopération islamique (OCI), où les zones rurales accueillent près de la moitié de la population et où l'agriculture emploie plus de 200 millions de personnes. Malgré les progrès récents en matière de performance agricole, les systèmes alimentaires des pays de l'OCI restent fortement vulnérables aux changements climatiques, aux conflits, à la volatilité des marchés et aux chocs mondiaux, les femmes et les jeunes ruraux étant touchés de manière disproportionnée. Dans le même temps, ces groupes représentent une force largement sous-exploitée pour la transformation des systèmes alimentaires.

Cet article examine comment les femmes et les jeunes ruraux agissent comme catalyseurs de systèmes alimentaires inclusifs, résilients et durables dans les pays de l'OCI, en s'appuyant sur les priorités stratégiques et l'expérience opérationnelle de la Banque islamique de développement (IsDB). Il met en lumière les contraintes structurelles auxquelles sont confrontés les femmes et les jeunes dans les systèmes agroalimentaires, notamment l'accès limité à

la terre, au financement, aux compétences et aux marchés, tout en démontrant comment des investissements ciblés peuvent libérer des gains de productivité, d'emploi et de résilience.

Ancré dans le Cadre stratégique décennal (2026–2035) du Groupe de la IsDB, l'article illustre comment l'autonomisation des femmes et des jeunes en tant que leaders, entrepreneurs et innovateurs renforce les chaînes de valeur, améliore la sécurité alimentaire et contribue à la réduction de la pauvreté.

À travers des exemples programmatiques sélectionnés, notamment le soutien aux entreprises agroalimentaires dirigées par des femmes et des initiatives de développement des compétences destinées aux jeunes, l'article souligne qu'investir dans les femmes et les jeunes ruraux constitue non seulement un impératif social, mais aussi un choix économique stratégique. Il conclut que des approches coordonnées et centrées sur les personnes sont essentielles pour bâtir des systèmes alimentaires capables de générer une croissance inclusive et une résilience à long terme dans l'ensemble des pays membres de l'OCI.

## ملخص AR

محدودية الوصول إلى الأراضي، والتمويل، والمهارات، والأسواق، مع بيان كيف يمكن للاستثمارات الموجهة أن تفتح آفاقاً لتعزيز الإنتاجية، وخلق فرص العمل، وزيادة القدرة على الصمود. وانطلاقاً من الإطار الاستراتيجي العشري لمجموعة البنك (2026-2035)، توضح الورقة كيف أن تمكين النساء والشباب بوصفهم قادة ورواد أعمال ومبتكرين يساهم في تعزيز سلاسل القيمة، وتحسين الأمن الغذائي، ودعم الحد من الفقر.

ومن خلال عرض نماذج برنامجية مختارة، بما في ذلك دعم المشاريع الزراعية التي تقودها النساء، ومبادرات تنمية المهارات الموجهة للشباب، تؤكد المقالة أن الاستثمار في النساء والشباب في المناطق الريفية ليس مجرد ضرورة اجتماعية، بل خيار اقتصادي استراتيجي. وتخلص إلى أن اعتماد نهج منسق يضع الإنسان في صميم الاهتمام يعد أمراً أساسياً لبناء نظم غذائية قادرة على تحقيق نمو شامل وتعزيز القدرة على الصمود على المدى الطويل في دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي.

تظل الزراعة ركيزة أساسية لسبل العيش والتشغيل والأمن الغذائي في دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي، حيث تحتضن المناطق الريفية ما يقارب نصف السكان، ويوفر القطاع الزراعي فرص عمل لأكثر من 200 مليون شخص. وعلى الرغم من التحسن الذي شهده الأداء الزراعي في السنوات الأخيرة، لا تزال النظم الغذائية في دول المنظمة شديدة الهشاشة أمام تغير المناخ، والنزاعات، وتقلبات الأسواق، والصدمات العالمية، مع تأثير النساء والشباب في المناطق الريفية بشكل غير متناسب. وفي الوقت ذاته، تمثل هذه الفئات قوة كامنة إلى حد كبير يمكن أن تساهم في تحويل النظم الغذائية.

تتناول هذه المقالة الدور الذي تؤديه النساء والشباب في المناطق الريفية كمحفزين لنظم غذائية شاملة وقادرة على الصمود ومستدامة في دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي، مستندة إلى الأولويات الاستراتيجية والخبرة التشغيلية لمجموعة البنك الإسلامي للتنمية. وتسلط الضوء على القيود الهيكلية التي تواجه النساء والشباب في نظم الأغذية والزراعة، ولا سيما

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# BRIDGING QUALITY AND SECURITY: HARMONIZING STANDARDS FOR INCLUSIVE FOOD SYSTEMS IN OIC MEMBER STATES



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## INTRODUCTION: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN FOOD SECURITY

In the global discourse on food security, the conversation is frequently dominated by production volumes—harvest tonnage, land cultivation, and yield optimization. However, for the 57 Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), ensuring a food-secure future requires a multidimensional approach that extends beyond quantity.

An equally critical dimension is the ability to demonstrate that food is safe, of high quality, and fully compliant with market and regulatory requirements. Without these assurances, food cannot move efficiently across borders, gain consumer confidence, or generate sustainable economic value. Within this context, quality infrastructure emerges not just as a technical necessity, but as a strategic pillar for regional stability and economic growth.

## STANDARDS AS STRATEGIC ENABLERS OF INCLUSION

From the perspective of the **Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC)**, standards and conformity assessments are more than technical tools; they are enablers of economic empowerment and employment creation. By harmonizing standards and strengthening quality infrastructure, SMIIC supports the development of food systems that are reliable and globally competitive.

Through specialized OIC/SMIIC standards covering **Halal food**, safety management, hygiene, packaging, and traceability, the Institute provides a “common technical language.” This framework allows producers to navigate market access requirements with clarity, reducing the fragmentation that often hampers trade. As market confidence increases, trade flows stimulate higher production levels, creating a direct demand for labor across the agricultural and food-processing sectors—a dynamic that is vital for the economic integration of rural women and youth.

## THE INTERSECTION OF FOOD SECURITY AND QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE

While the FAO defines food security through four main pillars—availability, access, utilization, and stability—the “utilization”

and “stability” pillars are heavily dependent on food safety and standardized quality. The FAO emphasizes that food security cannot exist without food safety; if it is not safe, it is not food. SMIIC fills a critical gap in this global framework by translating these high-level requirements into actionable OIC/SMIIC Standards and Technical Regulations. By issuing harmonized documents—such as specific requirements for Halal food safety (OIC/SMIIC 1), guidelines for accreditation bodies, and technical specifications for testing laboratories—SMIIC provides the necessary deliverables that transform abstract food security goals into a verifiable, regulated reality. These documents serve as the “quality blueprint” that ensures food not only reaches the table but is also nutritious, safe, and compliant with the cultural and health requirements of the OIC community.

## THE VISION OF “ONE STANDARD, ONE CERTIFICATE, RECOGNIZED EVERYWHERE”

A primary challenge to intra-OIC trade is the presence of unnecessary technical barriers. SMIIC addresses this through the guiding principle: “One Standard, **One Certificate, Recognized Everywhere.**” This approach ensures that a product certified according to relevant OIC/SMIIC Standard by an accredited certification body in one Member State is accepted across other OIC markets without the burden of duplicative, costly re-certification.

A key instrument in realizing this vision is the **OIC Global Halal Quality Infrastructure (OHAQ)**. By fostering mutually recognized accreditation systems based on OIC/SMIIC Standards, OHAQ strengthens trust in Halal certification. As trade volumes grow, the entire value chain—from farming and logistics to compliance services—expands, providing a pathway for rural enterprises to scale up with confidence.

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND GENDER-INCENTIVIZED TRAINING

Standard-setting must be paired with implementation. SMIIC places a heavy emphasis on awareness-raising and capacity-building through targeted training programs on relevant OIC/SMIIC Standards that refers to food safety and quality management systems. Notably, specialized training initiatives have been designed for member states and the private sector. And some trainings were addressed to specifically for women experts, recognizing their indispensable role in implementation of OIC/SMIIC Standards.

## THE SMIIC–IOFS SYNERGY: FROM STANDARDS TO FIELD IMPLEMENTATION

While SMIIC provides the technical framework, the **Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS)** possesses a strong comparative advantage in reaching rural communities and grassroots actors across Member States. The potential for enhanced collaboration between these two institutions is significant.

Joint SMIIC–IOFS initiatives could play a pivotal role in expanding training and awareness programs targeted at rural women and youth. By working together, these organizations can ensure that technical standards and quality requirements are translated

ed into practical, actionable knowledge at the field level, linking producers to markets more effectively.

## CONCLUSION: CULTIVATING LONG-TERM ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Embedding quality at the core of food systems is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development across the OIC region. When standards are accessible, they cease to be obstacles and instead become tools for empowerment. By fostering a culture of quality, SMIIC and IOFS are not only increasing food availability but are ensuring that rural women and youth are recognized as key actors in value creation, trade, and long-term economic resilience.

### EN SUMMARY

This article highlights the strategic importance of harmonized standards and quality infrastructure in building inclusive and resilient food systems across OIC Member States. It argues that food security requires not only availability but also safety, quality, and regulatory compliance. SMIIC plays a central role by developing OIC/SMIIC standards and conformity assessment frameworks for Halal food,

hygiene, traceability, and laboratory competence, translating global food security goals into practical tools.

Harmonization, mutual recognition, and the OHAQ system reduce trade barriers, stimulate production, and create employment, particularly for rural women and youth. Capacity building and SMIIC–IOFS collaboration further ensure field-level implementation and long-term economic resilience.

### FR RÉSUMÉ

Cet article met en lumière l'importance stratégique de l'harmonisation des normes et de l'infrastructure qualité pour la construction de systèmes alimentaires inclusifs et résilients dans les États membres de l'OIC. Il soutient que la sécurité alimentaire ne dépend pas uniquement de la disponibilité des denrées, mais également de leur innocuité, de leur qualité et de leur conformité réglementaire. Le SMIIC joue un rôle central en élaborant des normes OIC/SMIIC et des cadres d'évaluation de la conformité pour les aliments halal, l'hygiène, la traçabilité et la compétence

des laboratoires, traduisant ainsi les objectifs mondiaux de sécurité alimentaire en outils pratiques.

L'harmonisation, la reconnaissance mutuelle et le système OHAQ contribuent à réduire les barrières commerciales, à stimuler la production et à créer des emplois, en particulier pour les femmes et les jeunes ruraux. Le renforcement des capacités et la collaboration entre le SMIIC et l'IOFS garantissent en outre une mise en œuvre efficace sur le terrain et une résilience économique à long terme.

### ملخص AR

المختبرات، بما يترجم أهداف الأمن الغذائي العالمية إلى أدوات عملية قابلة للتطبيق.

كما يساهم توحيد المعايير، والاعتراف المتبادل، ونظام QAHO في الحد من العوائق التجارية، وتحفيز الإنتاج، وخلق فرص العمل، لا سيما للنساء والشباب في المناطق الريفية. ويعزز بناء القدرات والتعاون بين CIIMS والمنظمة الإسلامية للأمن الغذائي (SFOI) التنفيذ على مستوى الميدان، ويدعم تحقيق قدرة اقتصادية مستدامة على المدى الطويل.

تسلط هذه المقالة الضوء على الأهمية الاستراتيجية لتنسيق المعايير والبنية التحتية للجودة في بناء نظم غذائية شاملة وقادرة على الصمود في دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي. وتؤكد أن تحقيق الأمن الغذائي لا يقتصر على توافر الغذاء فحسب، بل يشمل كذلك سلامته وجودته والامتثال للمتطلبات التنظيمية. ويضطلع معهد المواصفات والمقاييس للدول الإسلامية (CIIMS) بدور محوري من خلال تطوير معايير CIIMS/CIO وأطر تقييم المطابقة للأغذية الحلال، والنظافة، وإمكانية التتبع، وكفاءة



# BEYOND BORDERS: A NEW PARADIGM OF OPEN DATA AND COLLABORATION TO SECURE OIC FOOD SYSTEMS



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## INTRODUCTION

Plant health serves as the vital foundation for the resilience and stability of every biome on Earth, including human civilization. In our interconnected global agricultural landscape, a pathogen in one hemisphere can escalate into a catastrophe in another within a single growing season. History offers a somber testament to this vulnerability: the Irish Potato Famine. Triggered by the introduction of the oomycete *Phytophthora infestans* from Mexico to Ireland via infected potato tubers, the subsequent crop failures between 1845 and 1849 led to the death and emigration of over two million people, followed by outbreaks that devastated harvests across Europe for decades (Ristaino et al. 2001; Martin et al. 2013).

Today, a new adversary has emerged. Wheat blast, caused by the fungus *Magnaporthe oryzae* pathotype *Triticum* (MoT), first evolved in the Paraná state of Brazil in 1985 and has since spread to neighboring South American nations, posing a catastrophic threat to global food security (Igarashi 1986; Islam et al. 2020). For the member states of the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS), where wheat is the cornerstone of both nutritional security and economic stability, the threat of such transboundary plant diseases is not a theoretical concern—it is an existential risk.

## THE BANGLADESH EXPERIENCE: A PARADIGM SHIFT

In 2016, the threat became a reality when Bangladesh faced the first-ever epidemic of wheat blast in Asia. The outbreak devastated 15,000 hectares of wheat belonging to resource-poor farmers. The traditional scientific response—characterized by closed data and delayed publication—would have been too slow to contain a pathogen of this volatility. Instead, the response to the Bangladesh outbreak marked a masterclass in a paradigm shift: the transition from “siloe science” to a radical model of Open Data Sharing, Open Science, and International Collaboration (Islam et al. 2016). By prioritizing immediate transparency over academic exclusivity, we were able to mobilize the global scientific community to address a national emergency in real-time.

Through field pathogenomics, our team—in collaboration with international partners—released raw sequence data of the infected samples to the public domain immediately. This invited

the global scientific community to contribute their expertise in real-time (Callaway 2016). Within just six weeks, we identified the culprit: a South American lineage of MoT and immediately published in bioRxiv to share with the global scientific community. Further investigation revealed a sobering truth: the fungus had likely been introduced via wheat imports from Brazil just a year prior. This “open” approach allowed the Government of Bangladesh to move with unprecedented speed, inviting global experts who had been studying wheat blast since its emergence in Paraná in 1985.

## THE GLOBAL TRAIL: FROM BANGLADESH TO ZAMBIA

The necessity of this collaborative model was validated in subsequent years. In 2017, the disease appeared in West Bengal, India, and by 2018, it caused a severe outbreak in Zambia. Genomic analysis—facilitated by the same open-data protocols—confirmed that both the Zambian and Bangladeshi outbreaks were caused by the same B71 MoT lineage from South America (Latorre et al. 2023). This experience mirrored the global scientific response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In both cases, the rapid sharing of genetic sequences and the breaking of institutional “ego-walls” saved countless lives and livelihoods.

## A PARADIGM SHIFT CRITICAL DISCUSSION FOR OIC MEMBER STATES

The successful mitigation of the wheat blast epidemic in Bangladesh offers a transformative blueprint for the member states of the IOFS, centered on three critical policy shifts. First, we must redefine transparency as a primary defense mechanism. While traditional biosecurity frameworks often resort to secrecy to avoid immediate trade repercussions, the Bangladesh experience proves that early, open disclosure is the most effective way to mobilize global intelligence and mitigate long-term economic devastation.

Second, OIC member states must prioritize genomic surveillance as essential national infrastructure. Just as countries invest in physical food reserves, there is an urgent need to invest in “Digital Pathogen Reserves.” Establishing real-time genomic monitoring of imports and field samples allows for the detection of biological threats before they reach epidemic proportions, effectively turning data into a frontline biosecurity shield. Finally, this model enables a transition toward collaborative leadership.

By championing “Open data sharing and Open Science” initiatives, OIC countries can move beyond being technology consumers to emerge as global leaders in agricultural innovation, boosting a regional knowledge-based economy.

## PROPOSED NEW REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

To harness the power of open science, the IOFS should integrate three strategic pillars into its central policy documents. First, an OIC Open Data Protocol must be established as a standardized framework for the secure, transparent sharing of genomic data regarding transboundary pests, thereby removing the fear of immediate trade sanctions and fostering a regional culture of collective biosecurity. Second, the organization should build Regional Centers of Excellence in Pathogenomics to serve as specialized hubs for rapid-response molecular diagnostics and real-time pathogen tracking, as successfully demonstrated by the Bangladesh wheat blast experience (Gupta et al. 2026). These centers will ensure that all member states, regardless of individual resources, have access to the cutting-edge tools necessary to identify biological threats within weeks.

Finally, it is imperative to Modernize Import Safety Standards by refining OIC-wide phytosanitary regulations based on the lessons learned from the introduction of South American MoT into Bangladesh. Integrating point-of-care diagnostics into quarantine systems will provide the rigorous screening required for international trade, effectively blocking the entry of devastating pathogens into new territories (Gupta et al. 2026).

## CONCLUSION: A NOVEL VISION FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

The successful containment of wheat blast in Bangladesh represents a novel departure from traditional, reactive biosecurity. By replacing “intellectual silos” with a radical commitment to Open Data and International Collaboration, we demonstrated that the interval between the emergence of a pathogen and its molecular identification can be compressed from years to a mere six weeks. This novelty lies not just in the technology of field pathogenomics, but in the social and political courage to share data in real-time—a strategy that has now been successfully benchmarked against the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking toward the future, the stability of OIC food systems depends on our ability to institutionalize this “Bangladesh Model” across the region. As climate change continues to shift the geographical boundaries of plant diseases, OIC member states must move beyond traditional border controls toward a knowledge-driven biosecurity architecture. Future perspectives include the integration of artificial intelligence with genomic data to predict pathogen evolution and the deployment of decentralized, point-of-care diagnostics in the hands of smallholder farmers. By embedding Open Science into our regulatory and cultural DNA, the OIC can lead the global South in transforming agricultural emergencies into opportunities for scientific leadership and collective resilience, ensuring that the food systems of the Ummah remain secure against the unseen threats of tomorrow.



## EN SUMMARY

Plant health serves as the vital foundation for the resilience and stability of every biome on Earth, including human civilization. In our interconnected global agricultural landscape, a pathogen in one hemisphere can escalate into a catastrophe in another within a single growing season. History offers a somber testament to this vulnerability: the Irish Potato Famine. Triggered by the introduction of the oomycete *Phytophthora infestans* from Mexico to Ireland via infected potato tubers, the subsequent crop failures between 1845 and 1849 led to the death and emigration of over two million people, followed by outbreaks that devastated harvests across Europe for decades (Ristaino et al. 2001; Martin et al. 2013).

## FR RÉSUMÉ

La santé des végétaux constitue le fondement vital de la résilience et de la stabilité de chaque biome sur Terre, y compris de la civilisation humaine. Dans notre paysage agricole mondial interconnecté, un agent pathogène apparu dans un hémisphère peut se transformer en catastrophe dans un autre en l'espace d'une seule saison culturale. L'histoire offre un témoignage sombre de cette vulnérabilité : la Grande Famine irlandaise. Déclenchée par l'introduction de l'oomycète *Phytophthora infestans* du Mexique vers l'Irlande par le biais de tubercules de pomme de terre infectés, les pertes de récoltes entre 1845 et 1849 ont entraîné la mort et l'émigration de plus de deux millions de personnes, suivies d'épisodes qui ont ravagé les récoltes à travers l'Europe pendant des décennies (Ristaino et al., 2001 ; Martin et al., 2013).

Today, a new adversary has emerged. Wheat blast, caused by the fungus *Magnaporthe oryzae* pathotype *Triticum* (MoT), first evolved in the Paraná state of Brazil in 1985 and has since spread to neighboring South American nations, posing a catastrophic threat to global food security (Igarashi 1986; Islam et al. 2020). For the member states of the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS), where wheat is the cornerstone of both nutritional security and economic stability, the threat of such transboundary plant diseases is not a theoretical concern—it is an existential risk.

Aujourd'hui, un nouvel adversaire est apparu. La brûlure du blé, causée par le champignon *Magnaporthe oryzae* pathotype *Triticum* (MoT), est apparue pour la première fois dans l'État du Paraná, au Brésil, en 1985, et s'est depuis propagée aux pays voisins d'Amérique du Sud, représentant une menace catastrophique pour la sécurité alimentaire mondiale (Igarashi, 1986 ; Islam et al., 2020). Pour les États membres de l'Organisation islamique pour la sécurité alimentaire (IOFS), où le blé constitue la pierre angulaire de la sécurité nutritionnelle et de la stabilité économique, la menace de telles maladies végétales transfrontalières n'est pas une préoccupation théorique – c'est un risque existentiel.

## ملخص AR

واليوم، برز خصم جديد يتمثل في مرض لفحة القمح، الذي يسببه الفطر *Magnaporthe oryzae* النمط المرضي (MoT) ، وقد ظهر لأول مرة في ولاية بارانا بالبرازيل عام ٥٨٩١، ثم انتشر إلى دول مجاورة في أمريكا الجنوبية، مشكلاً تهديداً كارثياً للأمن الغذائي العالمي (Igarashi, ٦٨٩١ ; Islam et al., ٢٠٢٢). وبالنسبة للدول الأعضاء في المنظمة الإسلامية للأمن الغذائي (IOFS) حيث يُعد القمح حجر الزاوية في كل من الأمن الغذائي والاستقرار الاقتصادي، فإن خطر الأمراض النباتية العابرة للحدود ليس مجرد احتمال نظري، بل يمثل تهديداً وجودياً حقيقياً.

تُعد صحة النبات الأساس الحيوي لمرونة واستقرار جميع النظم البيئية على كوكب الأرض، بما في ذلك الحضارة الإنسانية. ففي المشهد الزراعي العالمي المترابط اليوم، يمكن لمرض يظهر في أحد نصفي الكرة الأرضية أن يتحول إلى كارثة في النصف الآخر خلال موسم زراعي واحد فقط. ويقدم التاريخ شاهداً مؤلماً على هذه الهشاشة من خلال مجاعة البطاطا الإيرلندية، التي اندلعت نتيجة إدخال الكائن الشبيه بالفطريات *Phytophthora infestans* من المكسيك إلى إيرلندا عبر درنات بطاطا مصابة، حيث أدت إخفاقات المحاصيل بين عامي ٥٤٨١ و ٩٤٨١ إلى وفاة وهجرة أكثر من مليوني شخص، تلتها موجات تفشي دمرت المحاصيل في أنحاء أوروبا لعقود (Ristaino et al. ٢٠٠٢؛ Martin et al. ٢٠٢٢).

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# FROM MARGINS TO MARKETS: HOW RURAL WOMEN AND YOUTH ARE TRANSFORMING OIC FOOD SYSTEMS



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## INTRODUCTION: PREPARING FOR TRANSFORMATION

A significant number of women and youth are preparing for their roles in the Green Waqf Project on a 6,500 sq. ft. Waqf plot in Karachi, anticipating training and future opportunities in sustainable food systems. This initiative exemplifies how innovative financing, skills development, and strategic partnerships can transform idle land into hubs of empowerment, learning, and local economic growth.

Food systems across OIC Member States face mounting challenges: climate shocks, fragile supply chains, and rapid demographic growth strain production and distribution. Rural women and youth, who produce, harvest, and manage natural resources, often remain excluded from profitable markets and decision-making processes. Empowering them is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic necessity for resilient, inclusive, and market-driven food systems.

## ICCD'S APPROACH: TURNING MARGINS INTO MARKETS

The Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD) implements integrated interventions that bring women and youth into market-oriented, climate-resilient food systems.

- The Green Waqf Project: reimagines the traditional Waqf as a modern development instrument. By converting underutilized land into agricultural and community spaces, the project creates opportunities for income generation, skills development, and environmental restoration.
- The Sustainable Agriculture Investment Forum: connects policymakers, investors, and development institutions to finance agri-businesses and scale women- and youth-led enterprises.
- Agri-Tech workshops: equip participants with practical skills in digital agriculture, climate-smart practices, and modern farm machinery.

Together, these initiatives move rural populations from subsistence farming toward market participation.

## MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS: UNLOCKING ACCESS TO FINANCE

A critical enabler of ICCD's vision is the role of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), which provide tailored financial and non-financial services to marginalized populations. By offering microloans, savings accounts, insurance, and financial literacy programs, MFIs empower rural women and youth to move beyond subsistence farming into market-oriented enterprises.

Within the OIC framework, ICCIA's Microfinance and Development Corporation has demonstrated how Islamic finance products can be adapted to microfinance models that respect Shariah principles while fostering entrepreneurship. These instruments embed ethical and community-centered values into financial transactions while enabling access to capital.

MFIs complement ICCD's initiatives by:

- Enhancing youth participation through digital microfinance tools that reduce overheads and improve customer reach.
- Promoting women's empowerment by offering consultancy, training, and financial literacy programs.
- Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly poverty reduction, decent work, reduced inequalities, and partnerships for sustainable growth.

By integrating MFIs into ICCD's programs, access to finance becomes a catalyst for transformation rather than a barrier.

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH

Despite their critical roles, rural women face barriers such as restrictive social norms, limited access to education, and constrained land ownership. Youth encounter high unemployment, skills gaps, and perceptions of farming as unprofitable. In 2024, 26.3% of young people in OIC countries were classified as NEET (not in employment, education, or training), exceeding global averages.

ICCD's programs tackle these barriers by providing access to land, skills, and finance, while creating supportive institutional networks. This integrated approach ensures that women and youth are not only included but positioned as leaders in food system transformation.

## FROM CONCEPT TO IMPACT: PREPARING FOR CHANGE

The Green Waqf Project serves as a model of forward-looking empowerment. Although cultivation has not yet started, the initiative is designed to provide practical experience once launched, including urban gardening, composting, water-efficient farming, and community engagement.

The Sustainable Agriculture Investment Forum will serve as a platform that promotes growth by connecting women- and youth-led enterprises with investment and market opportunities. In addition, Agri-Tech workshops will equip participants with the skills to increase productivity, manage resources efficiently, and compete in regional markets.

As these interventions evolve, the planned establishment of MFIs is envisioned to provide a future financial backbone, aligning access to capital and financial literacy with training and land opportunities. Together, these activities articulate a long-term vision in which coordinated support pathways can gradually move marginalized populations toward a more central role within inclusive and resilient food systems.

## ICCD'S VISION FOR SCALING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

ICCD envisions strategic partnerships as a key mechanism to amplify the impact of initiatives that empower women and youth in agriculture. Working collaboratively with OIC institutions such

as IOFS, SESRIC, IsDB, SMIIC, and local institutions such as Jamia-Tur Rasheed (JTR), ICCD aims to:

- Support the identification of gender- and youth-specific gaps and opportunities in rural communities.
- Facilitate access to agri-tech, value chains, and microfinance through strategic investment partnerships.
- Deliver capacity-building programs and technology support tailored to the needs of rural women and youth.
- Collaborate with local institutions like JTR to turn land, skills, and financial resources into tangible community-level outcomes.

Through these partnerships, ICCD seeks to scale initiatives collectively, fostering inclusive and resilient food systems that place women and youth at the center of sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION: INVESTING IN POTENTIAL

Rural women and youth are not merely beneficiaries; they are the drivers of food system transformation. ICCD envisions an integrated approach that combines innovative land use, technology, microfinance, and strategic partnerships as a pathway toward resilient, inclusive, and market-driven food systems.

Initiatives such as the Green Waqf Project, supported through the JTR partnership and planned crowdfunding for a Family Park, aim to transform idle land into hubs of opportunity, empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods. By scaling such initiatives across OIC Member States and aligning them with future MFIs as financial enablers, ICCD seeks to unlock the full potential of rural communities, turning margins into markets and fostering a sustainable future.



## EN SUMMARY

Across OIC Member States, rural women and youth remain at the margins of agriculture and food systems, despite being central to food security. The Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD) is pioneering approaches that transform this untapped potential into market-driven opportunities. Through initiatives such as the Green Waqf Project, the Sustainable Agriculture Investment Forum, Agri-Tech capacity-building, and

the integration of Islamic Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), ICCD demonstrates how inclusive, community-centered interventions can convert idle land and marginalized populations into vibrant contributors to food systems. This article highlights recent progress, practical lessons, and scalable pathways for building resilient and equitable food systems across the OIC.

## FR RÉSUMÉ

Dans l'ensemble des États membres de l'OIC, les femmes et les jeunes ruraux demeurent en marge de l'agriculture et des systèmes alimentaires, bien qu'ils soient au cœur de la sécurité alimentaire. La Chambre islamique de commerce et de développement (ICCD) met en œuvre des approches novatrices visant à transformer ce potentiel inexploité en opportunités orientées vers le marché.

À travers des initiatives telles que le projet Green Waqf, le Forum d'investissement pour l'agriculture durable, le renforcement des

capacités en agri-tech et l'intégration des institutions islamiques de microfinance (IMF), l'ICCD démontre comment des interventions inclusives et centrées sur les communautés peuvent convertir des terres inexploitées et des populations marginalisées en acteurs dynamiques des systèmes alimentaires.

Cet article met en lumière les progrès récents, les enseignements pratiques et les voies évolutives permettant de bâtir des systèmes alimentaires résilients et équitables à travers l'OIC.

## ملخص

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الزراعية، ودمج مؤسسات التمويل الإسلامي الأصغر (MFIs)، تُظهر ICCD كيف يمكن للتدخلات الشاملة والمركزة على المجتمع أن تحوّل الأراضي غير المستغلة والفئات المهمشة إلى مساهمين نشطين في نظم الغذاء. وتسلب هذه المقالة الضوء على التقدم المحرز مؤخراً، والدروس العملية، والمسارات القابلة للتوسيع لبناء نظم غذائية مرنة وعادلة عبر دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي.

في دول منظمة التعاون الإسلامي، لا تزال النساء والشباب في المناطق الريفية على هامش الزراعة ونظم الغذاء، على الرغم من دورهم المحوري في تحقيق الأمن الغذائي. وتُعدّ الغرفة الإسلامية للتجارة والتنمية (ICCD) رائدة في ابتكار أساليب تحول هذه الطاقات الكامنة إلى فرص مدفوعة بالسوق. ومن خلال مبادرات مثل مشروع الوقف الأخضر، ومنتدى الاستثمار في الزراعة المستدامة، وبناء القدرات في مجال التكنولوجيا



## A SEASON OF PARTNERSHIP AND PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENT. REFLECTIONS ON IOFS PARTNERSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY 2026



**SOFIAN BEN MOUADEB**

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The first months of 2026 have been a meaningful period for IOFS. Across diplomatic meetings, technical consultations, institutional visits, and regional workshops, the Organisation continued to invest in one of the most essential dimensions of food security work: partnership. These efforts may not always appear dramatic when viewed individually, yet they are often the foundation on which more practical and lasting cooperation is built. In that sense, early 2026 has been less about isolated events and more about continuity, coordination, and the gradual strengthening of relationships that can support Member States over time.

This spirit was already visible in January, when IOFS took part in the 48th Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs in Jeddah, as part of the preparatory process for the 52nd Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, scheduled later this year in Baghdad. The discussions were encouraging for the Organisation. Member States supported the broadening of IOFS future work to include women-related issues, particularly through the Women Agriculture Development Initiative developed with UN Women. At the same time, they reaffirmed support for the continuation of key IOFS programmes in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Africa. This was an important reminder that institutional trust is built not only through new ideas, but also through steady confidence in ongoing work.

“Food security cooperation rarely advances through one single event. More often, it moves through continuity, patient engagement, and the willingness to connect institutions over time.”

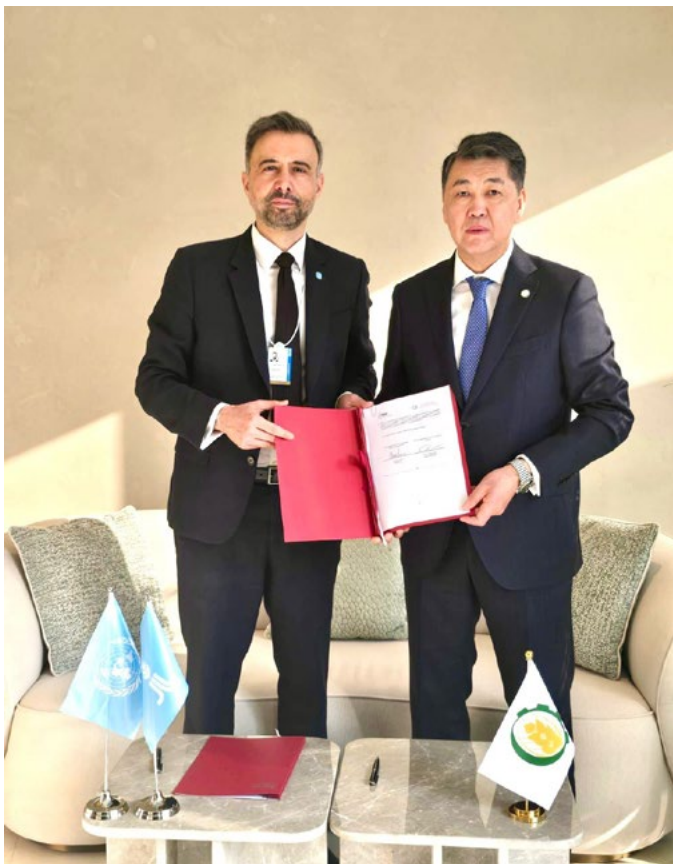
Only a few days later, the Organisation deepened its technical cooperation in the Arab region through a Joint Action Plan signed in Damascus with ACSAD. Covering 2026 to 2027, the plan focuses on climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable water management, livestock breeding, soil health, and combating desertification. During the same period, the Director General met Syria’s Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform to discuss support for agricultural recovery, and also held talks with the Syrian Development Fund on possible cooperation in practical development projects. Together, these exchanges reflected a shared interest in linking technical expertise with the needs of countries facing difficult environmental and recovery conditions.



The same practical approach shaped IOFS engagement in Lebanon. During an official visit to Beirut in late January, discussions with Lebanese counterparts focused on how IOFS might support the country's efforts through technical expertise, agricultural cooperation, and capacity building. Lebanon's possible future membership in the Organisation was also part of the exchange. While such conversations naturally take time, they matter because they open space for a deeper relationship, built on common priorities rather than formality alone.

A particularly visible moment came in early February, when IOFS participated in the AAAID conference in Dubai on initiatives to achieve food security in the Arab world. The conference offered an important platform for dialogue with regional and international partners working across agriculture, investment, and sustainable food systems. Participation in such spaces matters, not simply for visibility, but because they allow IOFS to position the concerns of Member States within wider conversations on financing, implementation, and institutional cooperation.

On the sidelines of that participation, IOFS signed a Letter of Intent with IFAD, opening room for future collaboration in agricultural and rural development, agribusiness, value chains, microfinance, and knowledge exchange. A Joint Action Plan was also concluded with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development AOAD. Additional discussions in Dubai touched on support for countries under severe pressure, including Sudan and Syria, as well as on the Wheat Farming Development Project in Mauritania and the broader question of improving agri-food trade links between Central Asia and the Gulf. Taken together, these exchanges showed that partnership is not only about signing documents. It is also about identifying where institutions can complement each other in concrete ways.



Back in Astana, this momentum continued. On 6 February, IOFS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EC IFAS, linking food security, water security, and sustainable development in the Aral Sea basin. In a region where environmental pressure

and agricultural sustainability are closely intertwined, this agreement reflects a realistic understanding that food security cannot be addressed in isolation from water management and ecological resilience.

A few days later, the Organisation strengthened another important line of work by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Global Crop Diversity Trust. The focus here was on national genebanks, crop diversity conservation, and technical capacity building. In many ways, this partnership speaks to the quieter side of food security. It is about preserving options for the future, protecting plant genetic resources, and ensuring that resilience is not discussed only in terms of immediate crises, but also in terms of long-term agricultural sustainability.

February also brought a number of useful bilateral and institutional contacts. In Astana, the Director General met with Kazakhstan's Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources to discuss climate resilience, sustainable natural resource management, and possible cooperation linked to the Green Climate Fund. The Minister also invited IOFS to contribute to the upcoming Regional Climate Summit in Astana. Around the same period, the Director General received the Chargé d'Affaires of Kuwait and the Ambassador of Somalia, with discussions focusing on food security, sustainable agriculture, livestock development, animal genetics, and drought response. Such meetings may seem routine, but they are often where practical cooperation begins.

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**“Partnerships grow step by step, and each exchange helps us move forward together.”**

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On 23 February, the Organisation also held consultations with the Ambassador of the European Union to Kazakhstan. The discussion explored cooperation in sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and agricultural innovation, while also highlighting IOFS flagship programmes in Afghanistan and Africa. For IOFS, these exchanges are important because they broaden the network of dialogue around Member State priorities and create opportunities for complementary support from outside the OIC geography.

In early March, a working visit to Baku added another encouraging development. Azerbaijan expressed its readiness to sign the IOFS Statute, a significant step toward accession to the Organisation. Discussions with the Minister of Agriculture covered sustainable agriculture, food safety systems, research cooperation, and regional food security initiatives. The visit also included consultations with TURKPA on the role of parliamentary dialogue in supporting agricultural and food policy cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries.

Alongside these partnerships, the first part of 2026 also included several activities that gave technical depth to the Organisation's broader institutional engagement. In Baghdad, IOFS and the Ministry of Agriculture of Iraq organised a national workshop on climate-smart agriculture, soil health, and combating desertification. The workshop brought together government institutions, legal experts, researchers, and practitioners, and concluded with recommendations intended to support Iraq's transition toward a more climate-resilient agricultural system.

In Astana, IOFS convened a technical consultation with the World Organisation for Animal Health, bringing together veterinary authorities and technical experts from Central Asia and Azerbaijan to examine barriers affecting OIC meat exporters.

The discussion highlighted an important paradox: OIC countries possess major livestock resources, yet intra-OIC meat trade remains limited due to regulatory, procedural, and market-access obstacles. This type of technical dialogue is not always visible outside specialist circles, but it is essential if food trade within the OIC space is to become more efficient and predictable.

Another important contribution came through the Regional Workshop of the Africa Livestock Resilience Program in Nairobi, organised with IsDB, ILRI, and UNDP. Delegations from 14 African OIC Member States discussed livestock resilience, inclusive value chains, climate adaptation, digital services, halal industry opportunities, and innovation for women and youth.

This workshop reflected a useful blend of policy discussion and field-oriented learning, and showed once again that partnership is most valuable when it also creates technical pathways for implementation.

If there is one lesson from these first months of 2026, it is perhaps a simple one. Food security cooperation rarely advances through one single event. More often, it moves through continuity, through patient engagement, and through a willingness to connect institutions, expertise, and national priorities over time. In that sense, this season of partnership has not been about headlines alone. It has been about laying groundwork, and that may prove just as important in the months ahead.

## EN SUMMARY

This article reflects on the first months of 2026 as a period of sustained partnership-building and practical institutional engagement for the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS). Through diplomatic meetings, technical consultations, regional workshops, and cooperation agreements, IOFS strengthened its role as a platform connecting Member States with regional and international partners around shared food security priorities. The article highlights engagements with OIC institutions, Arab regional organizations, IFAD, EC IFAS, the Global Crop Diversity

Trust, the European Union, and several national authorities, with particular attention to climate-resilient agriculture, water management, livestock development, crop diversity, and agricultural recovery. It also underlines IOFS activities in Iraq, Africa, Central Asia, and the Arab region, showing how technical dialogue and institutional continuity can create practical pathways for implementation. Overall, the article argues that food security cooperation advances not through isolated events, but through steady coordination, trust-building, and long-term partnership.

## FR RÉSUMÉ

Cet article revient sur les premiers mois de 2026 comme une période marquée par le renforcement des partenariats et par un engagement institutionnel concret de l'Organisation islamique pour la sécurité alimentaire (IOFS). À travers des réunions diplomatiques, des consultations techniques, des ateliers régionaux et la signature d'accords de coopération, l'IOFS a consolidé son rôle de plateforme reliant les États membres à des partenaires régionaux et internationaux autour de priorités communes en matière de sécurité alimentaire. L'article met en lumière les échanges menés avec les institutions de l'OIC, des organisa-

tions régionales arabes, le FIDA, l'EC IFAS, le Global Crop Diversity Trust, l'Union européenne ainsi qu'avec plusieurs autorités nationales, en insistant notamment sur l'agriculture résiliente au climat, la gestion de l'eau, le développement de l'élevage, la diversité génétique des cultures et le relèvement agricole. Il montre également comment les initiatives menées en Iraq, en Afrique, en Asie centrale et dans le monde arabe traduisent une approche fondée sur la continuité institutionnelle, le dialogue technique et la coopération de long terme.

## ملخص AR

إلى جانب عدد من السلطات الوطنية، مع التركيز على الزراعة القادرة على التكيف مع المناخ، وإدارة المياه، وتنمية الثروة الحيوانية، وصون التنوع الوراثي للمحاصيل، ودعم التعافي الزراعي. كما توضح أن أنشطة المنظمة في العراق وأفريقيا وآسيا الوسطى والمنطقة العربية تعكس أهمية الاستمرارية المؤسسية والحوار الفني وبناء الثقة في تحويل الشراكات إلى مسارات عملية للتنفيذ. وتلخص المقالة إلى أن التقدم في التعاون من أجل الأمن الغذائي لا يتحقق عبر أحداث معزولة، بل من خلال التنسيق المتواصل والشراكات طويلة الأمد.

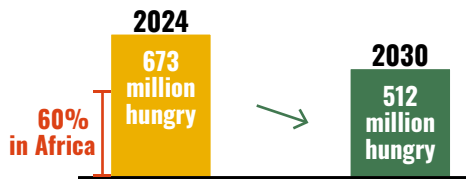
تتناول هذه المقالة الأشهر الأولى من عام ٢٠٢٦ بوصفها مرحلة اتسمت بتعزيز الشراكات والانخراط المؤسسي العملي داخل المنظمة الإسلامية للأمن الغذائي. فمن خلال الاجتماعات الدبلوماسية، والمشاورات الفنية، والورش الإقليمية، واتفاقيات التعاون، واصلت المنظمة ترسيخ دورها كمنصة تجمع بين الدول الأعضاء والشركاء الإقليميين والدوليين حول أولويات مشتركة في مجال الأمن الغذائي. وتبرز المقالة أوجه التعاون مع مؤسسات منظمة التعاون الإسلامي، والمنظمات العربية الإقليمية، والصندوق الدولي للتنمية الزراعية، والمركز التنفيذي للصندوق الدولي لإنقاذ بحر آرال، والصندوق العالمي لتنوع المحاصيل، والاتحاد الأوروبي،

# IOFS FOOD SECURITY UPDATE (MARCH 2026)

PROGRAMS DEPARTMENT

## GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY SITUATION

### Global Hunger Snapshot



Global food security remains fragile in early 2026, despite some modest progress in chronic hunger indicators in recent years. An estimated 673 million people faced hunger in 2024 (around 8.2-8.3% of the global population), a slight decline from 2023 levels but still well above pre-pandemic figures. Regional disparities persist, with hunger continuing to rise in Africa (over one in five people affected) and parts of western Asia, while improvements occurred in parts of Asia and South America. Projections indicate that, without accelerated action, around 512 million people could still face hunger by 2030, with nearly 60% in Africa.

Acute food insecurity, however, remains alarmingly high and is worsening in many hotspots. WFP’s estimates that 318 million people face crisis-level acute hunger (IPC Phase 3+) more than double pre-pandemic (2019) levels, with 41.1 million in Emergency or worse (IPC Phase 4+), a 20% increase since late 2020. This includes confirmed famines in parts of **Palestine (Gaza Strip)** and **Sudan**, the first simultaneous famines in two countries this century. The **GRFC 2025** and its September update reported over 295 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity in 2024 (sixth consecutive annual increase), with famine unfolding in Gaza and Sudan, and catastrophic (Phase 5) risks affecting nearly 1.4 million people across six countries/territories (primarily Gaza, Sudan, followed by South Sudan, Yemen, Haiti, and Mali). FAO-WFP hunger hotspots outlook (November 2025–May 2026) flags 16 countries/territories for deteriorating conditions, including high-concern areas like Haiti, Mali, Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, DRC, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, and Syria.

### Acute Hunger Crisis

**318 million**  
(IPC 3+)

**41.1 million**  
(IPC 4+)

More than  
**2x**  
since 2019

**Famine:**  
**Gaza & Sudan**  
16 hotspots

## GLOBAL PRICE TRENDS (FAO FOOD PRICE INDEX)

Recent data from the FAO Food Price Index shows that the index averaged 125.3 points in February 2026, up 0.9 percent from January. This marks the first increase after several months of decline. On a year-on-year basis, the FFPI is about 1 percent lower than its level in February 2025 and remains around 21.8 percent below the peak recorded in March 2022.

### BREAKING DOWN:

- The Cereal Price Index increased by 1.1 percent in February, driven largely by higher wheat prices amid frost risks in Europe and the United States and logistical disruptions in the Black Sea region. Rice prices also edged up slightly, supported by steady global demand.
- The Vegetable Oil Price Index rose by 3.3 percent, reaching its highest level since June 2022, mainly due to stronger prices for palm, soybean, and rapeseed oils, supported by firm import demand and expectations of supportive biofuel policies.
- The Meat Price Index increased moderately and remains about 8 percent higher than a year earlier, reflecting strong global demand and relatively tight exportable supplies, particularly for bovine and ovine meats.
- The Dairy Price Index declined by 1.2 percent, largely due to falling cheese prices amid improved milk availability and weaker demand in some export markets.
- The Sugar Price Index fell by 4.1 percent, reaching its lowest level since late 2020, as expectations of ample global supplies continued to weigh on prices.

### Price Breakdown by Commodity



These developments indicate that while global cereal markets remain relatively stable, rising prices for vegetable oils and meat could continue to contribute to food inflation pressures in many OIC countries, particularly those that rely heavily on imports for these commodities.

## STAPLES SUPPLY & DEMAND OUTLOOK (FAO CEREAL BRIEF)

According to the latest FAO Cereal Supply and Demand Brief (March 2026), global cereal production in 2025 has been raised marginally to a record high of 3,029 million tonnes, up 5.6% from the previous year. This reinforces the record level, with minor adjustments mainly to maize and rice estimates.

Improvements in coarse grain production (especially maize) remain a major contributor, alongside upward revisions to rice. For rice, FAO has raised its production estimate for Indonesia (to a decade high due to pronounced area expansion) and for Thailand. Combined with smaller adjustments for various other countries, these raised FAO's forecast of world rice production in 2025/26 by 1.7 million tonnes to 563.4 million tonnes (milled basis), up 2.1% year-on-year and a record high. Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, and Indonesia remain forecast to spearhead the season's annual production growth, outweighing contractions in Madagascar, Pakistan, Thailand, and the United States of America.

Wheat output prospects for 2025 are not detailed in the latest adjustments as the focus has shifted to rice and maize revisions, but overall cereal gains are strong despite any regional variations. These positive production forecasts for cereals, combined with record utilization at 2,943 million tonnes in 2025/26 (up 0.2% from the previous projection) and raised stocks to 940.5 million tonnes by the close of 2026 seasons (stocks-to-use ratio at a comfortable 31.9%), could significantly ease pressures in OIC countries that rely on imports—provided supply chains hold, trade policies are supportive, and access (finance, transport, tariffs) is maintained. World trade in cereals for 2025/26 is forecast at 501.7 million tonnes (up 3.5% from 2024/25, the second highest on record).

In the Near East Asia region, wheat crops in Iran are facing a varied yield perspective due to dry conditions early in the season, followed by helpful rainfall. Additionally, the planted area is anticipated to shrink because of higher production costs. In contrast, Türkiye is expected to see a modest rise in 2026 wheat production, driven by an increase in the sown area combined with a forecasted rebound in yields, which had been reduced by adverse weather in the previous season.

However, an early outlook for 2026 indicates global wheat production is anticipated to decline by nearly 3% to 810 million tonnes (still above the five-year average), reflecting moderate area cutbacks in response to softer crop prices and an expected return to average yields after the previous year's highs. Localized production risks (droughts, weather shocks, conflict) may still undermine food security in some member states. For maize south of the equator in 2026, prospects are above-average in Latin America, with South Africa expecting a second consecutive bumper crop.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN OIC MEMBER STATES

Food security trends across OIC countries remain highly heterogeneous. Several members continue to grapple with acute humanitarian emergencies driven by conflict, famine risks, displacement, and climate shocks, while others face challenges from production volatility, high inflation, drought, or trade disruptions. Recent updates highlight deepening crises in key hotspots, with persistent or worsening conditions into 2026.

### MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

- **Gaza Strip:** The entire population faces Crisis-level food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+), with confirmed famine-like conditions (Phase 5) in some areas. Humanitarian deliveries face severe looting, blockages, and access constraints, exacerbating the crisis amid ongoing conflict.
- **Yemen:** Economic collapse, declining aid flows, climate shocks, and conflict continue to leave millions in IPC Phase 3+, with elevated risks of further deterioration into 2026, including pockets at risk of catastrophic hunger.

- **Tunisia:** Improved rainfall conditions have boosted cereal harvests in 2024/25, though regional disparities remain.
- **Iran:** Wheat crops face a mixed yield outlook due to early-season dry conditions followed by beneficial rains. However, persistent multi-year drought (fifth consecutive year in 2025) has severely hampered winter wheat plantings for 2026, depleted irrigation reserves, and reduced production significantly (e.g., 2025 output below average, with government procurement down sharply). Planted area is expected to contract further owing to increased production costs, high input prices, and water stress, raising import reliance and food security concerns.
- **Syria:** Prolonged dry conditions have severely impacted crop production, estimated more than 60% below average in affected areas.

## SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

- **Afghanistan:** Four consecutive years of drought, economic distress, the return of over 2.5 million migrants (mainly from Iran and Pakistan) in 2025—with similar influxes expected in 2026—have driven severe food insecurity. The August 2025 earthquakes further disrupted markets and livelihoods, compounding vulnerabilities in rainfed areas. Acute hunger persists, with millions facing Crisis or worse levels and high malnutrition risks.
- **Pakistan and neighbors:** Regional fluctuations in rice and maize production underscore vulnerabilities in import-dependent areas. Ongoing drought, floods, and economic pressures affect affordability and access, with potential downstream impacts from neighbor dynamics.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

- **Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria:** Millions face acute food insecurity due to conflict, displacement, and climate shocks. Sudan experiences famine-like conditions in several regions, with widespread risks amid restricted access. Somalia faces deteriorating conditions from ongoing drought and below-average rainfall forecasts. Mali and Nigeria see high acute needs, with tens of millions in IPC Phase 3+; funding shortages severely limit interventions. These remain among the highest-concern hunger hotspots globally for 2026.

## EURASIA (TÜRKIYE & CENTRAL ASIA)

- **Türkiye:** As a key regional food supplier, production remains significant despite occasional export restrictions on staples (e.g., onions, potatoes, sunflower oil) to address domestic concerns. Early 2026 wheat prospects indicate a modest increase, supported by expanded planted area and projected yield recovery from prior weather-reduced levels—though broader regional dryness poses risks.
- **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan:** Recent harvests show positive production signals, but local price controls, export measures, and import restrictions continue to shape market access and affordability.

Overall, many OIC countries align with identified hunger hotspots (e.g., Palestine, Sudan, Yemen, Mali, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Syria), where conflict drives most acute needs, compounded by extreme weather (droughts in Iran/Afghanistan, floods elsewhere) and funding shortfalls. Urgent, scaled-up assistance, innovation, and conflict resolution remain critical to mitigate risks and build resilience.

## TRADE & PRICE PRESSURES

As of March 2026, trade measures and export restrictions on key staples persist or have intensified among several OIC members, often in response to domestic supply concerns, economic pressures, or geopolitical tensions. These policies, while intended to safeguard local availability, frequently contribute to heightened food price volatility, reduced regional trade flows, and amplified affordability challenges—particularly amid the ongoing conflict involving Iran, which has escalated regional disruptions.

Several OIC countries, including Pakistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria, continue to implement export restrictions or trade controls on staples such as grains, onions, potatoes, or other commodities to protect domestic markets. These measures risk distorting regional supply chains and increasing price pressures for import-dependent neighbors.

In Iran, the government has imposed a comprehensive ban on all food and agricultural product exports (announced in early March 2026), prioritizing domestic supply amid soaring internal prices and strategic reserve needs. This halt—following earlier localized restrictions on items like eggs, tomatoes, potatoes, and dates—has deepened food crises in neighboring countries reliant on Iranian supplies, such as Afghanistan, where prices for staples have risen sharply due to reduced cross-border flows. The ban, combined with broader conflict-related disruptions (e.g., threats to the Strait of Hormuz), is expected to further drive up regional and global food prices through constrained fertilizer exports (Iran is a key urea/ammonia supplier), elevated energy/transport costs, and shipping uncertainties—potentially exacerbating inflation for staples like wheat, rice, and other grains in OIC markets.


Broader conflict impacts include halted fertilizer shipments through critical routes, raising input costs for farmers worldwide and threatening yields in import-reliant OIC regions. While global cereal trade forecasts remain robust, localized restrictions and war-induced volatility heighten risks for vulnerable OIC populations, underscoring the need for coordinated policies to balance domestic protection with regional stability and access.


## IOFS POLICY OUTLOOK


Food security challenges in OIC countries remain diverse and acute in early 2026: persistent humanitarian crises in hotspots like Gaza (Palestine), Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia—marked by confirmed famines, conflict, displacement, restricted aid ac-


cess, and catastrophic risks—coexist with structural issues in South Asia (e.g., Afghanistan’s ongoing drought, over 2.5 million migrant returns, and earthquake disruptions) and the Sahel (e.g., Mali, Nigeria). These are worsened by extreme weather (multi-year droughts in Iran/Afghanistan, potential La Niña dryness), trade distortions (including Iran’s March 2026 full food/agricultural export ban amid conflict, spiking regional prices and fertilizer shortages), and humanitarian funding shortfalls that constrain responses.


As the OIC’s specialized institution for sustainable food security through agriculture, science/technology, humanitarian aid, trade, and cooperation, IOFS recommends these key priorities:


 **Prioritize humanitarian coordination and access** in crises like Gaza, Yemen, and Sudan, including support for programs such as “Flour for Humanity” to overcome blockages.

 **Strengthen regional food reserves and sharing**, advancing the OIC Food Security Reserves program via pilots and multilateral efforts for stability amid shortages/volatility.

 **Expand social protection** to protect vulnerable households from inflation and ensure access to safe, nutritious, halal food.

 **Adopt balanced trade policies** to curb spillovers from restrictions (e.g., Iran’s ban, others in Pakistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Nigeria), while boosting intra-OIC trade and addressing fertilizer/geopolitical disruptions.

 **Promote resilient, climate-smart agriculture** through improved irrigation/water management, cold chains, drought-resistant crops, and fertilizer access, per IOFS programs and partnerships.

 **Enhance nutrition interventions** for children, women, and malnourished groups to combat acute and hidden hunger.

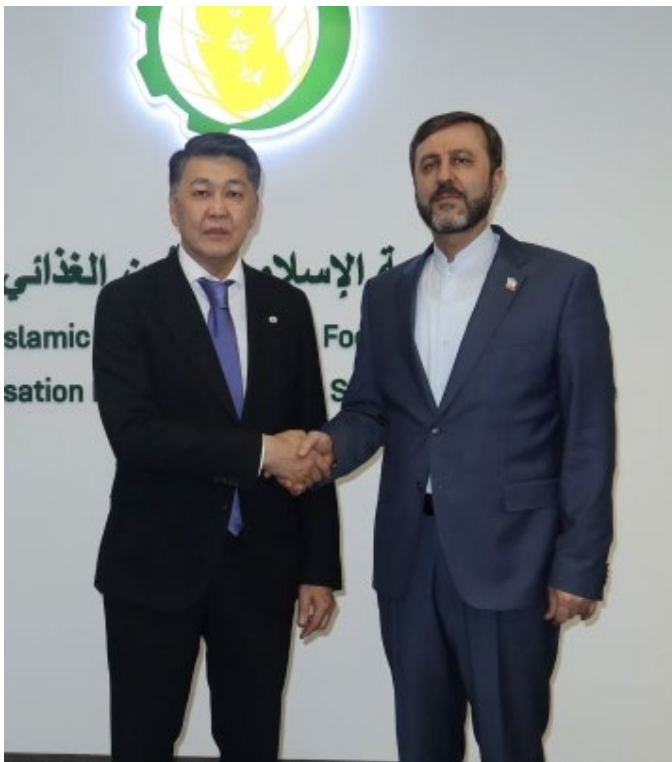
Long-term resilience requires deepened regional solidarity, increased financial commitments, and accelerated IOFS frameworks for sustainable, affordable halal food systems. Recent IOFS actions highlight collaborative momentum to bridge crises with development.

*This update has been prepared based on the **World Bank Food Security Update**, **FAO World Food Situation** data, and **IOFS analysis**.*



## IOFS NEWS OVER JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH

### IOFS Director General Meets Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Astana



On 15 January 2026, The Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS), H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn and H.E. Mr. Kazem Gharibabadi, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran met in Astana to discuss strengthening cooperation on food security. During the discussions, they focused on sharing Iran's expertise in self-sufficiency with other OIC Member States and addressing shared challenges like climate change through enhanced technical collaboration. The parties also emphasized that the ratification of the IOFS Statute would allow Iran to transition from an observer to a full member. This step would enable Iran to benefit from all organizational activities, including the opportunity to host the General Assembly and nominate Iranian nationals for staff positions.

### IOFS Delegation Visits Syria to Strengthen Agricultural Cooperation and Development Support





On 20 January 2026, His Excellency Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organization for Food Security arrived in Damascus to initiate a strategic visit aimed at boosting Syria’s agricultural recovery. During his high-level meeting with His Excellency Dr. Amjad Badr, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform they explored effective ways to strengthen local food initiatives and discussed the prospects of Syria’s future membership in the organization. Later, discussions shifted from general policy to practical implementation during talks with Mr. Mohammad Safwat Raslan, Director General of the Syrian Development Fund. These meetings focused on identifying specific development projects and building a resilient food system through strong regional partnerships with organizations like ACSAD.

### IOFS and ACSAD Sign Joint Action Plan to Strengthen Food Security in Arid Regions



On 21 January 2026, during the second day of his official visit to Syria, His Excellency Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director-General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security and His Excellency Dr. Nasreddine Al-Obeid, Director General of ACSAD signed a comprehensive Joint Action Plan for 2026–2027. This agreement, signed at ACSAD headquarters, builds on a 2022 Memorandum of Understanding and aims to tackle food security challenges in arid and semi-arid regions. During the ceremony, technical experts presented ACSAD’s regional achievements, setting the stage for collaboration on climate-resilient agriculture, water management, and soil health. This partnership transitions from theoretical research to practical action, combining ACSAD’s scientific expertise with the IOFS mandate to support member states.

### Member States Agree to Widen the Mandate of IOFS at the Preparatory Meeting of the 52nd Council of Foreign Ministers



From 20-22 January 2026, the Islamic Organisation of Food Security attended the 48th Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs (ICECS) meeting in Jeddah. The meeting, a preparatory step for the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), resulted in an agreement by OIC Member States to widen the IOFS mandate to include women-related issues and strengthen humanitarian assistance for Palestine, specifically calling for the expansion of programs to the West Bank and Al-Quds Al-Sharif alongside the Gaza Emergency Appeal. The commission also reaffirmed support for the Afghanistan Food Security Programme (AFSP) and the Africa Food Security Initiative (AFSI), highlighting IOFS’s role in advancing food security and resilience across member states.

### IOFS Director General Concludes Official Visit to Lebanon to Strengthen Food Security Cooperation



H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, concluded an official visit to Beirut on 22–23 January 2026, during which he held meetings with H.E. Dr. Nizar Hani, Minister of Agriculture of Lebanon, Engineer Louis Lahoud, Director General of Agriculture, and H.E. Mr. Salim Baddoura, Director General for International Organization Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. The discussions focused on strengthening cooperation in food security and agricultural development, including support for enhancing productivity, technology transfer, and capacity-building, as well as exploring Lebanon's potential membership in IOFS. Conducted with the support of H.E. Rasul Zhumaly, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Lebanon, the visit underscored a shared commitment to advancing practical cooperation in response to Lebanon's ongoing food security challenges.

## IOFS Director General and Delegation Award Winners at the International Presentation of the World Book of Records for Asia and Africa



In Astana, the Director General of the IOFS, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, and his delegation participated in the official presentation of the World Book of Records for Asia and Africa (GBR). The event focused on celebrating extraordinary human achievements and cultural heritage, bringing together diplomats, government officials, and record holders to honor resilience and global traditions. During the ceremony, the IOFS highlighted the shared geographical focus between their organization and the GBR, as both operate extensively across Asia and Africa. The Director General presented awards to various achievers, recognizing their unique contributions to the historical legacy of their respective regions and the broader international community. The participation of the IOFS underscores a commitment to fostering regional identity and sustainable development. By shifting the focus from purely technical cooperation to the recognition of cultural and human excellence, the organization reinforces the bonds of perseverance and partnership among its Member States.

## IOFS and IOM Discuss Cooperation on Migration, Agriculture, and Food Security with Focus on Kyrgyzstan

On 28 January 2026, the IOFS hosted a delegation from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Astana to discuss strategic cooperation in Central Asia. The meeting focused on improving migration governance and supporting the reintegration of migrants in Kyrgyzstan, with a specific emphasis on those returning from seasonal agricultural programs in the UK and the challenges faced by Afghan refugees. During the session, both organizations explored how to use agriculture as a primary tool for livelihood and social cohesion in border areas. A key highlight was the proposal to launch the Women Agriculture Development Initiative (WADI) in Kyrgyzstan, aiming to provide sustainable employment opportunities for women returning from abroad. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to addressing the intersection of migration and food security. By shifting the focus from general oversight to practical reintegration tools, the IOFS and IOM aim to build more resilient communities through digital services and agricultural empowerment.



## IOFS Participates in the Regional Training on Drone-Based Desert Locust Control in Oman



From 25-29 January 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security participated in a specialized regional training program in Oman focused on using drones for desert locust control. This initiative, organized by FAO commissions and the Omani government, highlights the growing importance of high-tech surveillance in protecting agricultural landscapes from devastating transboundary pests. During the event, the IOFS representative, Dr. Abdelaziz Hajjaji, emphasized that precision technology is essential for safeguarding food security. The training provided experts from 15 Member States with the skills needed for early warning and monitoring, allowing for faster and more environmentally responsible responses to locust outbreaks compared to traditional methods. The IOFS reaffirmed its commitment to managing transboundary threats across Central Asia, Africa, and the MENA region. By transitioning from manual monitoring to advanced drone technology, the organization aims to reduce crop losses and prevent food crises, ensuring more resilient agricultural systems for vulnerable populations.

## IOFS Director General Leads High-Level Delegation to Dubai, Signs Strategic Partnerships to Advance Food Security

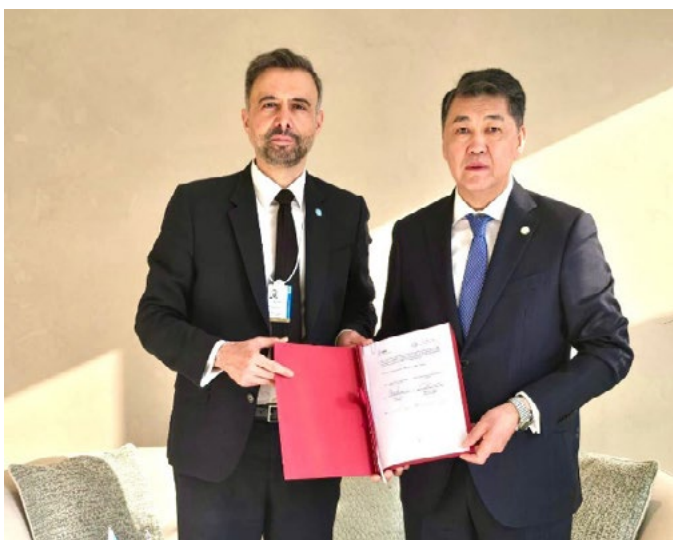
H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, led the IOFS delegation to the Conference on Initiatives to Achieve Food Security in the Arab World in Dubai, organized by the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development, where he delivered a keynote address emphasizing collective action, sustainable investment, and strengthened partnerships. On the sidelines, he held high-level meetings, including with Professor Ibrahim Adam Ahmed El-Dukheri, Director General of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), resulting in the signing of a Joint Action Plan for 2026–2028; with Dr. Nasser Alkahtani, AGFUND Special Envoy, and Dr. Conrad Rein, Secretary General of the Global Flagship Initiative for Food Security of Crop Trust, focusing on coordinated support to countries facing acute food insecurity, including Sudan and Syria; and with H.E. Dr. Abdallahi Ould Souleymane Ould Cheikh-Sidia, Minister of Economy and Development of Mauritania, to advance the Wheat Farming

Development Project. The visit also included engagement with private sector companies from the UAE and Kuwait to enhance intra-regional trade and food security cooperation, reaffirming IOFS's commitment to strengthening partnerships and supporting Member States in addressing food security challenges.





## IOFS Reaches New Milestone in Global Food Security Cooperation with IFAD



On 5 February 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security reached an important institutional milestone with the signing of a Letter of Intent (LoI) with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), reinforcing its growing cooperation with the United Nations system in food security, sustainable agriculture, and rural development. The LoI was signed in Dubai by H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, IOFS Director General, and H.E. Mr. Dr. Alvaro Lario, IFAD President, reflecting a shared commitment to enhanced coordination in supporting common Member States facing challenges related to rural poverty, climate vulnerability, and limited access to finance and markets. This development builds on IOFS's expanding engagement with UN agencies, including the Letter of Intent with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in July 2024, as well as Memoranda of Understanding with the International Organization for Migration (IOM – UN Migration) in May 2025 and the World Food Programme (WFP) in October 2025, further positioning IOFS as a constructive partner within the international development community. Under the LoI, both organizations will explore cooperation in agricultural and rural development, agribusiness and value-chain development, private sector and microfinance, capacity development, and knowledge exchange, in line with their respective mandates.

## IOFS and EC IFAS Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Strengthen Cooperation on Food, Water, and Environmental Security



On 6 February 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in addressing challenges related to food and water security, sustainable agriculture, rural development, and environmental protection. The MoU was signed by H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of IOFS, and H.E. Ambassador Askhat Orazbay, Chairman of EC IFAS, marking an important step toward enhanced coordination in the Aral Sea region and other water-stressed areas. Under the agreement, both organizations will collaborate on joint programmes and projects focused on integrated water and land resource management, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture, including efforts to improve water use efficiency, irrigation and governance, strengthen rural livelihoods, and address environmental challenges such as desertification, soil degradation, salinity, and water scarcity. The partnership also aims to contrib-

ute to poverty reduction and promote sustainable food systems and environmental restoration, reflecting IOFS's continued commitment to advancing food and water security through strengthened institutional cooperation.

## IOFS Director General Meets with the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan

On 11 February 2026, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, met with H.E. Mr. Yerlan Nyssanbayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, to discuss cooperation in climate resilience, sustainable natural resource man-

agement, and food security. During the meeting, Ambassador Aryn presented IOFS's strategic priorities, highlighting efforts to advance climate-smart agriculture, strengthen the adaptive capacity of farming communities, and promote regional cooperation and knowledge exchange. Minister Nyssanbayev extended an official invitation to the Director General to participate in the upcoming Regional Climate Summit in Astana, which was welcomed by IOFS, alongside initial proposals focusing on capacity building, policy dialogue, and regional cooperation platforms. The discussion also explored opportunities for collaboration within the framework of the Green Climate Fund, with the Ministry expressing readiness to support coordinated initiatives. Both sides noted the strong alignment of their mandates and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening practical cooperation to enhance climate resilience, sustainable environmental management, and food security in Kazakhstan.



## IOFS Director General Receives Courtesy Call from Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Kuwait in the Republic of Kazakhstan



On 12 February 2026, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, received Mr. Meshari Alsaegh, Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the IOFS Headquarters in Astana. During the meeting, the parties exchanged views on strengthening cooperation between IOFS and the State of Kuwait, particularly in the areas of food security, sustainable agriculture, and regional development. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing practical collaboration and exploring joint initiatives aimed at supporting sustain-

able agricultural development and strengthening food security across IOFS Member States.

## Africa Livestock Resilience Program Regional Workshop Advances Partnerships and Country Action Pathways for Sustainable Livestock Transformation

From 9-12 February 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), successfully concluded the Regional Workshop of the Africa Livestock Resilience Program (ALRP), bringing together 14 national delegations from African OIC Member States, alongside development partners, research institutions, and private-sector stakeholders. Over four days, participants engaged in strategic dialogue, technical exchange, and field visits to advance climate-resilient livestock systems that strengthen food security and rural livelihoods. On behalf of IOFS, Dr. Ismail Abdelhamid conveyed the greetings of H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of IOFS, reaffirming the Organisation's commitment to sustainable livestock development. The workshop featured country consultations, technical discussions across key transformation pillars, and presentations including IOFS's work on livestock in the OIC and joint value chain assessments with GGGI. Field visits showcased practical models linking research, production, and markets, while dedicated sessions on private

sector engagement and women and youth innovation highlighted inclusive approaches, including IOFS's Women in Agrifood Development Initiative (WADI). The workshop concluded with a forward-looking roadmap for country-level implementation, marking an important step toward coordinated action to enhance livestock resilience and food security across Africa.



## IOFS Director General Meets with Chairman of the Board of NASEC

On 13 February 2026, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, met with Mr. Baurzhan Asanov, Chairman of the Board of NASEC – The National Agrarian Science Educational Centre, at the IOFS Headquarters in

Astana. The meeting reaffirmed the strong partnership between IOFS and NASEC and focused on advancing cooperation in agricultural science, research, and innovation. Both sides reviewed progress of joint initiatives and discussed further steps to strengthen collaboration in support of sustainable agricultural development and food security, with particular emphasis on plant genetic resources conservation, scientific exchange, and capacity building. The parties highlighted the importance of translating frameworks into practical actions and reiterated their commitment to continued partnership and the implementation of priority projects.



## IOFS and Iraq Strengthen Climate-Smart Agriculture Policy Framework Through National Workshop in Baghdad



From 9-12 February, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Iraq, successfully conducted a four-day national workshop on "Strengthening the Policy and Institutional Framework for Climate-Smart Agriculture to Improve Soil Health and Combat Desertification in Iraq," in Baghdad. The event brought together representatives from key government institutions, legal and legislative bodies, academic and research institutions, and national experts to engage in technical sessions, working groups, and a study visit to the National Center for Organic Agriculture. Discussions focused on addressing soil degradation, climate vulnerabilities, and desertification, while emphasizing the need for strengthened policy and institutional frameworks. The workshop concluded with the development of key recommendations to support Iraq's transition toward a sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural system. The activity forms part of IOFS's Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under its Vision 2031, reflecting its continued commitment to strengthening Member States' capacity to address food security challenges through policy support, institutional development, and technical innovation.

## Regional Technical Consultation on Market Access Barriers for OIC Meat Trade



On 13 February 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, in cooperation with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), convened a closed-door Technical Consultation in Astana, with heads and senior representatives of veterinary authorities from Central Asia and Azerbaijan to provide regional inputs to the Study on Market Access Barriers for OIC Meat Exporters. The meeting brought together chief veterinary officials and technical experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan to examine systemic constraints limiting intra-OIC meat trade, despite significant livestock resources and growing demand. Discussions highlighted structural challenges, including limited mutual recognition of veterinary systems, additional import requirements, procedural duplication, and administrative delays affecting certification and market access. Participants emphasized the need for coordinated regional approaches to address these barriers and enhance regulatory alignment, predictability, and trust among trading partners. The consultation identified common constraint patterns and prioritized areas for reform, with inputs to be consolidated by IOFS into a regional analytical matrix contributing to the broader study, ultimately supporting strengthened intra-OIC trade and improved food security resilience across Member States.

## IOFS Participates in Dala Camp Forum 2026 on the Development of Kazakhstan's Meat Industry



From 14-15 February 2026, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, led by Director General H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, participated in the Dala.Camp Forum 2026, held at Rixos Burabay at the invitation of Mr. Mereke Taitubayev, Head of the Subregional Representation for Central Asia of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Convened under the theme “Cattle in Kazakhstan’s Meat Industry: A Roadmap for the Future,” the forum brought together key stakeholders to discuss

the development of Kazakhstan’s meat sector, including export potential, investment, productivity, and veterinary standards. Ambassador Aryn participated as a speaker, highlighting growing global demand for meat, opportunities to expand intra-OIC trade, and Kazakhstan’s comparative advantages, while emphasizing the importance of quality, compliance with international standards, and supply reliability. He reaffirmed IOFS’s role in supporting cooperation among Member States in agriculture and food security, including efforts to strengthen trade, harmonize standards, and promote sustainable livestock systems. The forum provided a valuable platform for public-private dialogue and partnership building to enhance Kazakhstan’s position in regional and global food markets.

## IOFS and Crop Trust Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Strengthen Food Security Cooperation



The Islamic Organisation for Food Security and the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in food security, agricultural sustainability, and the conservation of crop diversity. The agreement was signed by H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of IOFS, and Dr. Stefan Schmitz, Executive Director of the Crop Trust, establishing a framework for joint activities focused on knowledge exchange, capacity building, and cooperative projects to support IOFS Member States. Ambassador Aryn emphasized that strengthening crop diversity is a strategic imperative for food sovereignty and resilience, while Dr. Schmitz highlighted the importance of supporting national genebanks and enhancing technical capacity for conservation. The partnership aims to promote sustainable agricultural practices, strengthen institutional

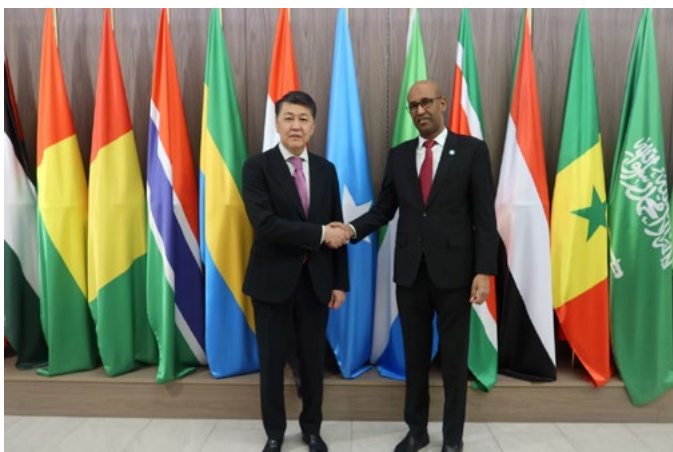
capacities, and contribute to long-term food security through coordinated international cooperation.

## IOFS and European Union Explore Stronger Partnership on Food Security



On 23 February 2026, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, met with H.E. Ms. Aleška Simčić, Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan, to discuss cooperation in food security, sustainable agriculture, and development. The Director General commended the European Union's engagement in Central Asia and reaffirmed IOFS's commitment to strengthening partnerships through initiatives focused on capacity building, policy coordination, and resilient food systems, including the Afghanistan Food Security Program (AFSP) and the Africa Food Security Initiative (AFSI). Both sides explored opportunities for collaboration aligned with shared priorities such as climate resilience and agricultural innovation and expressed their commitment to advancing engagement within the framework of the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between the OIC General Secretariat and the European External Action Service.

## IOFS Director General receives Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Somalia to the Republic of Turkiye and the Republic Kazakhstan



On 25 February 2026, IOFS Director General H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn met with H.E. Ambassador Fathudin Ali Mohamed of Somalia to discuss strengthening cooperation in food security and agricultural development, with a focus on livestock, animal genetics, and drought management. The Somali side highlighted the severe humanitarian situation caused by drought, affecting around six million people, including two million in critical condition. Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to advancing practical collaboration, with IOFS expressing readiness to support Somalia's agricultural sector and address urgent food security challenges, and Somalia conveying its willingness to deepen partnership moving forward.

## In the Spirit of Ramadan: IOFS Supports Families in need in Astana

During the holy month of Ramadan, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, led by Director General H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, distributed food baskets to families in need at Al Farabi Mosque in Astana, in coordination with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan and with support from the Embassy of Saudi Arabia. The initiative provided essential food items to vulnerable households to ease their daily burden during fasting, while also reflecting IOFS's broader humanitarian efforts, including programmes in Afghanistan and Gaza. Ambassador Aryn emphasized that food is a shared responsibility, and beneficiaries expressed appreciation for the timely support, noting it allowed them to observe Ramadan with greater peace of mind.

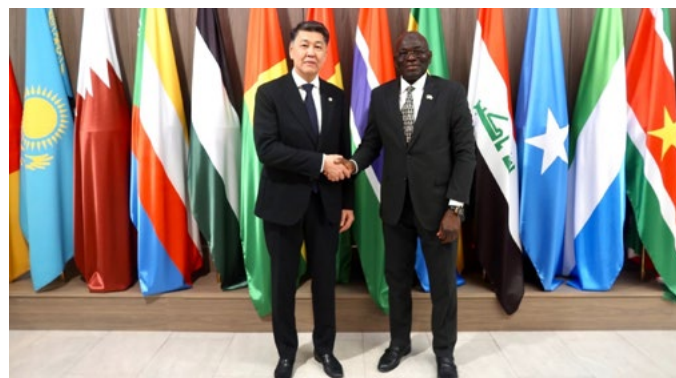





During a working visit to Baku on 4–5 March 2026, H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, met with H.E. Mr. Majnun Mammadov, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where the Azerbaijani side expressed its readiness to sign the IOFS Statute at the earliest opportunity, paving the way for the country’s accession to the Organization. The discussions focused on strengthening cooperation in sustainable agriculture, agricultural research, food safety systems, and regional food security initiatives within the OIC framework. Ambassador Aryn welcomed Azerbaijan’s decision and expressed appreciation for the country’s engagement in IOFS initiatives, including its support for the IOFS humanitarian effort for Gaza. The sides also explored opportunities to expand cooperation in intra-OIC agri-food trade, agricultural supply chains, knowledge exchange, and research collaboration. During the visit, the IOFS Director General also met with H.E. Mr. Ramil Hasan, Secretary General of TURKPA, to discuss strengthening cooperation on food security and sustainable agriculture among Turkic-speaking countries.


## AZERBAIJAN EXPRESSES READINESS TO SIGN IOFS STATUTE


## IOFS DIRECTOR GENERAL RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF THE GAMBIA, REAFFIRMING COMMITMENT TO FOOD SECURITY COOPERATION



H.E. Ambassador Berik Aryn, Director General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, received H.E. Mr. Alkali Fanka Conteh, Ambassador of The Gambia to Türkiye and concurrent Ambassador to Kazakhstan, at IOFS Headquarters in Astana on 6 March 2026. The meeting reviewed opportunities to strengthen cooperation in food security and sustainable agriculture within the OIC framework, with The Gambia expressing interest in collaboration on the cassava value chain and rice sector. Ambassador Aryn briefed the Ambassador on IOFS flagship initiatives, particularly the Africa Food Security Initiative (AFSI), reaffirming the Organization’s readiness to advance practical cooperation with Gambian institutions and encourage broader participation in IOFS programmes and capacity-building initiatives.

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