

RESEMBID COVID-19 RESILIENCE RESPONSE FACILITY

Context, Policy and Guidelines

I. Introduction

The **Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity (RESEMBID)** programme, funded by the European Union (11 EDF) and implemented through Expertise France, offers a demand-driven and bottom-up approach to technical assistance for the twelve Overseas Countries and Territories of the Caribbean (OCTs). They are: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos, and Saint Barthélemy.

The five-year programme (2019-2023) offers technical assistance in three interconnected thematic areas. The third (cross-cutting) component on enhancing resilience to extreme natural events was developed to increase the resilience of economically and environmentally vulnerable Caribbean OCTs in the face of extreme recurrent natural events, and to be prepared for other natural disasters. Public health emergencies such as epidemic outbreaks and pandemics, although less frequent, are also included. Activities include the following: a) disaster preparedness & response, aiming at reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience of economic infrastructure through regional/multicounty initiatives and b) disaster risk assessment, and risk finance & insurance.

- Evolving pandemic in the OCTs

The COVID-19 outbreak, which was first reported in China in December 2019, has now become a global pandemic. The disease marches through the planet implacably and at a rapid pace. At time of writing the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases globally nears the two-million mark, and nearly 200,000¹ people have perished. The pathogen is highly infectious and stealthy, with a relatively long asymptomatic incubation period, greatly complicating containment and management. Tragically, these figures are expected to rise considerably, perhaps even dramatically. In the (10)(2a) some 347,000² cases have been confirmed in the (10)(2a) alone, and exponential growth of the rate of infection and deaths is expected. This unfolding tragedy is stretching beyond their limits the public health systems and economies of even those countries endowed with vast medical, technological and institutional resources.

The (10)(2a), highly vulnerable economically at the best of times, and equipped with public health systems of limited capacity, have not been spared, seeing rising rates of infection and, gradually, mortality. Governments, international organisations and other informed observers anticipate significant impacts both to the inhabitants and their highly vulnerable, economically skewed, tourism-overdependent economies.

The capacity to cope with the effects of major disasters, already limited for the OCTs due to their small and undiversified economic base, is further constrained by their exclusion from most sources of international financing (e.g. (10)(2a)). As a result, there is a need to reduce structural vulnerability and increase sustainably the resilience of key sectors and communities affected. As OCT governments endeavour to stem the tide of this pandemic and counter its short- and long-term impact across critical sectors, a multi-sectoral response is needed. The objective is to meet immediate health emergency care and response needs, while ensuring that a social safety net is created to support people whose income may drastically reduce during this crisis, and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable citizens. This crisis may have begun as a public health emergency but already has become, for every country in the world, a **crisis of societal resilience**, whose shock ripples across every single sector of society and area of economic activity, and whose repercussions will be far reaching and long lasting.

¹ Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, [www. https://coronavirus.jhu.edu](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu)

² *ibid*

The public health systems of the OCTs today are under enormous pressure and in dire need of assistance. They are ill-equipped to face the demand for basic primary and secondary healthcare, let alone an epidemic of global proportions. To give a single example, Sint Maarten's medical centre currently only has three intensive care unit beds which as of writing are occupied by non-COVID patients. In this context, the need for urgent technical assistance to governments, as well as essential equipment and supplies, can be readily seen at all levels, and requires a whole-of-society approach to face the challenge of COVID-19.

Furthermore, the Atlantic hurricane season, some eight weeks away, is upon us. Indeed, scientists predict for 2020 more major hurricanes than is typical per year: 4 as opposed to the average of 2.7. The forecast calls for a nearly 70 percent chance of a major hurricane (category 3-5).³ The nexus between the effects of a major hurricane and an ongoing social, economic and public health emergency such as COVID-19 are daunting and need no elaboration to a Caribbean readership.

In this extraordinary context of the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience building can help OCTs rebound from the toll the virus will take on healthcare, the economy, education, and employment. The RESEMBID programme provides a timely opportunity, suitable and flexible platform to strengthen OCTs resilience in face to this pandemic and to build more resistant safety nets across various sectors.

In particular, the RESEMBID programme offers a unique means for providing technical assistance and eligible equipment to the twelve OCTs that is urgently needed. This document presents the specially designed framework, **RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility** (hereafter "the Facility") to enable the Programme to provide a response of requisite agility, flexibility and speed. This rapid adjustment has been possible thanks to the responsiveness of the European Union and its team at the ^{10)(2a)} Delegation at ^{(10)(2a)} as well as the team at ^{(10)(2a)}.

II. Rationale

This Facility will supply the authorities with a rapid response and readiness tool for dealing with urgent challenges and needs related to the COVID-19 crisis, providing assistance for the interventions required by the beneficiaries and approved by the RESEMBID team.

- Strategic relevance

A key strategic outcome of the RESEMBID programme is to support the OCTs to plan for long-term resilience and climate-smart growth. Unlike predicting stresses on a building in a hurricane, predicting those related to COVID-19 is a Sisyphean task in the OCTs context. Systems like health care or education are too complex for mathematical calculations to determine the risk and fallout in the OCTs and Caribbean Region. The coronavirus pandemic is currently placing extraordinary pressures on vulnerable populations and economies that already are deeply affected by a changing climate and limited economic opportunities. In an effort to alleviate the long-standing burden and secondary impacts of COVID-19, which include the disruption of livelihoods, markets, communities and services, the RESEMBID programme under its Strategic Output 3, and in response to COVID-19 has instituted the **RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility**.

³ "Extended range forecast of Atlantic seasonal hurricane activity and landfall strike probability 2020". (Colorado State University), April 2020. The Department of Atmospheric Science at CSU has been producing hurricane forecasts for 37 years, with considerable predictive reliability.

- A Facility integral to the RESEMBID Programme

The unfolding pandemic has taken virtually all countries by surprise, and few programmes and projects could have anticipated such circumstances and disruptions to their implementation. This is no exception for the RESEMBID programme, which mostly considered extreme recurring natural hazards such as hurricanes and earthquakes amongst the likely scenarios.

Although pandemic responses and readiness actions may have some inherent public health emergency specificities, they also present challenges and opportunities for countries and communities similar to those following extreme weather events such as those experienced with hurricane Irma in 2017. The responses generated by the countries, communities and economic sectors will have defining impacts on the future of these islands. Efforts to mainstream resilience in all aspects of planning will greatly determine future socio-economic outcomes. This principle is at the very heart of the "DNA" of the RESEMBID Programme.

Consequently, the Programme team strongly believe the establishment of this Facility will contribute, in a tangible, pragmatic way to supporting the overarching aim of the Programme, which is the sustainable human development of the Caribbean OCTs.

III. Purpose

To support the OCTs in their response to the COVID-19 crisis, the (10)(2a) and (10)(2a) (10)(2a) have approved the initiative **RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility**. The initiative aims to facilitate fast-track financing of actions, services and in-context supplies and equipment to strengthen the capacity of OCTs to respond readily to this societal emergency with wide-ranging repercussions.

IV. Scope of the COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility

Within the scope of the existing RESEMBID budget and the € (10)(1c) set aside for grants, the (10)(2a) (10)(2a) and (10)(2a) have agreed to earmark, through the establishment of this regional Facility, up to € (10)(1c) for COVID-19 Resilience support in the twelve overseas countries and territories.

This 'soft' earmarking offers the OCTs enhanced flexibility and speed to access support of their collective and individual response and readiness to the unfolding pandemic.

It should be noted that OCTs may choose not to apply for funding under the RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility, and opt instead to prioritise actions identified during the formulation mission the Programme conducted in-country from October 2019 to February 2020. The decision rests with each OCT.

The intent of the Facility is simply to afford OCTs, at a time of extraordinary crisis, a more flexible range of options and expedited approval procedures specifically for COVID-19 resilience response actions. It cannot be emphasised enough that the ownership of the programme rests squarely with the OCTs. In this spirit, (10)(2a) will continue to administer these funds diligently and responsively to the evolving needs.

V. Key Policy Components

The main objective of the facility as indicated in Section III is to fast-track financing for COVID-19 resilience specific actions, and strengthen the capacity of the 12 Caribbean OCTs in key sectors. The Facility as part of RESEMBID within the 11th (10)(2a) promotes a demand-driven, bottom-up approach, identifying initiatives and actions in line with OCT priorities and needs.

- Fast-track simplified process:

Recognising the urgency of needs and the fluidity of the COVID-19 response within each OCT, RESEMBID will support the application for funding by reducing the amount of application forms and documents to a minimum. The process will be guided by four (4) main phases:

1. **Application:** RESEMBID application dossier consisting of a Concept Note outlining the activities and proposed budget.
2. **Appraisal:** Received applications for funding will be reviewed by the RESEMBID team on a fast-track basis in line with set criteria.
3. **Contract award:** following standard administrative checks, and expedited contract clearance process the contract is signed
4. **Implementation:** monitoring and oversight by RESEMBID team with provision of support and guidance as needed
5. **Evaluation:** evaluation and accountability activities to be conducted during and following execution, as appropriate

- Needs-based and informed by learning from public health emergencies

The RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility will be made available strictly based on the articulated needs and priorities of programme beneficiaries. As a result, it is crucial for partners to be able to measure and forecast effectively their specific needs based on learnings from case studies from other countries in (10)(2a) as well as key lessons from the response to 2009 H1N1 Swine Flu and the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreaks. Incorporating the learnings from these outbreaks can help policy makers and planners better estimate the trajectory of COVID-19 and identify the best mitigation measures which are applicable and relevant to their country.

- Eligible implementing partners:

Implementing partners eligible to apply for the RESEMBID COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility are the same as for regular RESEMBID funding, including regional bodies, OCT public institutions, public utilities and other statutory entities. Community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross and private sector actors may also be eligible.

- Eligible actions:

The full extent of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic at the regional, national and community level is still uncharted and the RESEMBID programme is committed to safeguarding and reinforcing resilience at all strata.

Funds can be used for:

- Strengthening of institutional capacities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Provision of technical support to primary institutional stakeholders and frontline entities
- Staff training and the deployment of response teams
- Technical assistance for pandemic strategy and policy development
- Equipment and supplies specifically related to COVID-19 crisis response needs
- Public education and community mobilisation programmes

Note: An indicative, non-exhaustive list of examples of eligible funding is included in the Annex under Section VIII

- **Exclusions – the Facility will not finance the following:**

- Direct budget support
- Cash transfers of any kind (conditional or unconditional) including to citizens or migrants or undocumented workers.
- Provision of loans and credit lines
- Logistics support (air and shipping freight) and medical evacuations
- Salaries or stipends
- Costs of deploying medical teams (air fares, subsistence allowances, remuneration and other related expenses).
- User fees for health services to cover the medical expenses of individual COVID-19 patients.
- Financial compensation for operational expenses or financial loss of private/public entities.

- **Gender-sensitive:**

Beyond reporting basic disaggregated data, gender considerations are often overlooked in health emergencies. In the Caribbean OCTs, women are the primary caregivers in many households, and comprise approximately 70% of vital roles in the health and social sectors. Consequently, women not only bear a greater social burden, but face an increased risk of exposure as frontline workers in any crisis. Accordingly, differentiated impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. It is important to remember that more than 70% of global healthcare workers are women, and an even larger number are caregivers to individuals who have underlying conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to the disease. Girls and women experience outbreaks differently than boys and men. A gender lens appropriately highlights specific vulnerabilities and capacities because of deeply rooted inequalities and traditional gender roles. As COVID-19 Resilience Response actions are formulated, special care will be given to ensure they account for how the crisis is experienced by women and girls, and tailor specific measures to address specific needs (e.g. access to healthcare, food and non-food items including sanitation products).

- **Coordination and information-sharing:**

Coordination amongst partners and information-sharing are critical considerations in supporting countries to deliver an effective response to crises. Historically, this proves to be a challenging exercise, that is often fragmented and uneven. The Facility recognises the importance of this element in order to maximise the effectiveness of its support to the OCTs. We will coordinate with our partner the (10)(2a) and the (10)(2a) with whom we already work in close and fluid cooperation in the framework of the RESEMBID programme and the (10)(2a)

The Facility will take a proactive approach by establishing a dedicated process. A protocol and a platform are being put in place to maintain and share key information to support decision-making and approval reviews, and help rationalise requests from countries. This platform will be populated by information from OCTs and international partners involved in response to the crisis.

VI. **Modalities**

- ***Direct Award Grants:*** In order to address speedily OCT needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis in the OCTs and expedite the grand awarding process, the Facility avails of a **direct award grant instrument**.
- ***Procurement:*** support to the OCTs through a dedicated expedited procurement service for equipment and supplies **directly and demonstrably linked to COVID-19 emergency response**
- ***Technical Assistance:*** technical expertise; project development

VII. Accountability

In the management of the funds entrusted to the Programme by the (10)(2a) and by (10)(2a) The Facility will adhere to best practice in financial management and procurement practices, so as to ensure rigour and accountability throughout the entire contracting cycle. These principles will be closely adhered to, as embodied in the procurement policies and procedures of (10)(2a) and the (10)(2a) including Article 2.6.1. of the practical guide on contract procedures for (10)(2a) signifying eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria, as fundamental principles of the procurement process.

VIII. Annex

In general, technical assistance, equipment and supplies directly and demonstrably linked to the deployment of COVID-19 emergency response.

Ensuring coordination of response actions is a specific requirement for grant approval.

Since aid coordination within an OCT, whether local or from external partners, whether ongoing or forthcoming, is the responsibility of the government, RESEMBID will rely on your cooperation to facilitate ready and full information sharing.

List of examples of eligible actions (indicative and not exhaustive)

Regional level

- Establish a (sub)regional pandemic response team to be deployed to hotspots (see example of the Netherlands Government providing medical response teams covering Sint Maarten, Saba, St Eustatius, and Bonaire).
- Strengthen (sub)regional laboratory and influenza surveillance capacity.
- Organise post-facto knowledge sharing/lessons learnt events.
- Training frontline health workers through regional training facilities.
- Collection and analysis of epidemiological data and other relevant information-sharing among OCTs.
- Sharing good practices in quarantine/isolation practices of suspected or sick patients.
- Facilitate technology transfer e.g. expanding and sharing the GIS system in place on Bonaire.
- Broaden joint response and preparedness actions between Sint Maarten and Saint Martin, to also include (10)(2a), St Eustatius and Saba.
- Support the development of a "safe re-opening strategy" (including transport and tourism) for the OCTs.
- Strengthening ongoing SME employment initiatives currently being established: Bonaire Jobcentre, SXM MatchMaking, Aruba Incubator facility.
- Support harmonisation of processes and support efforts: current collaboration of (10)(2a), (10)(2a) (+ National Entities).

Country level

- Support pandemic risk assessment; KAP Survey among civil servants and the general population to develop relevant baselines.
- Bolster/establish epidemiological surveillance and data analysis.
- Separate pandemic response services and general health services, to avoid disrupting other forms of healthcare (e.g. cancer and dialysis treatment, maternity and neonatal care).
- Bolster helplines and remote consultations by doctors, nurses and mental health workers.

- Train rapid response teams to quarantine and isolate suspected cases, as well as health service providers, health management and support workers, and carers.
- Train relevant key public sector actors (e.g. all (10)(2a) on Sint Maarten) and awareness raising amongst civil servants.
- Establish and support inter-ministerial/departmental pandemic preparedness/coordination committees.
- Develop integrated response and readiness plans (e.g. worsening of the crisis, secondary events, or recurrence of the pandemic).
- Revise Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and clarify roles and responsibilities in the light of the current crisis.
- Produce checklists and operational tools for relevant emergency responders and civil servants
- Strengthen community-based services and adapt extension services in accordance with appropriate guidelines to ensure safety of workers and beneficiaries.
- Develop a national communication and public information strategy; partnership with the media to communicate effectively and optimise use of social media (including countering rumours, “fake news” and mis(dis)information generally)
- Monitoring social media and mitigating misinformation and “fake news” related to the pandemic and the integrated response.
- Facilitate early recovery planning for key sectors
- Equipment and supplies directly and demonstrably linked to COVID-19 emergency response

Community level

- Support community mobilisation and sensitisation campaigns and initiatives
- Support NGOs and community self-help groups to provide food parcels/ready-made meals to the elderly, isolated pregnant/lactating women, persons with disabilities
- Support psycho-social and mental health services.
- Support development and dissemination of Public Service Announcements (PSA) sensitising the population to safety/prevention measures (incl. social distancing, handwashing, safe grocery shopping, sterile techniques, home care of sick family members, etc.); tailored public health measures and messages to different cultures and segments of the population; multilingual resources (10)(2a).
- Identification of at-risk segments of the population; consider providing support to avoid unnecessary movements/travel/commuting.
- Prevent discrimination and stigma (see HIV and AIDS learnings) toward COVID-19 afflicted or recovering patients, specific ethnic groups (e.g. citizens of ethnic extraction at special risk of targeted discrimination – e.g. shopkeepers of Asian background), undocumented migrants and workforce.
- Support gender-sensitive programming e.g. action to prevent or mitigate increase of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), ensure procurement includes sufficient and appropriate hygiene products for women and older citizens.
- Identify and advocate for safe approaches to community mobilisation to respond and prepare.
- Support the monitoring of essential goods price tracking through social media to prevent undue price increases (“gouging”) from local vendors.

Public utilities and private sector

- Support business continuity of electricity and water sectors to maintain services throughout the crisis.
- Support emergency water supply to neighbourhoods without access to running water.
- Support emergency sanitation services to prevent further spread of disease and vectors in hotspots.
- Estimating the impact of the pandemic on the workforce to promote early recovery and targeted actions in the event of socio-economic stimulus programmes.