



DEBT RELIEF

CARIBBEAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
MEET ECLAC'S EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
TO ANALYZE DEBT RELIEF PROPOSALS

COVID-19

THE CARIBBEAN REGION
IN THE FACE OF THE PANDEMIC

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

INNOVATION IN DISASTER RISK
MITIGATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

Contents

- 4** Economic impact of COVID-19 in the Caribbean
- 8** Caribbean Heads of State and Finance Ministers meet ECLAC's Executive Secretary, Alicia Bárcena.
- 10** COVID-19: Caribbean Update
- 14** The government of Jamaica is building shelters for battered women
- 16** Innovation in Disaster Risk Mitigation in the Caribbean
- 18** Sustainable ocean management in the Caribbean
- 20** State of Affairs



About us

Issued on a monthly basis, The Hummingbird offers strategic insights into the latest projects, publications, technical assistance missions and research carried out by ECLAC Caribbean. In addition to these, sneak previews are provided of the most salient upcoming events, alongside enriching follow-ups to previously covered issues. With a view to featuring a variety of facets of Caribbean life and lifestyle, The Hummingbird also zooms in on cultural activities and landmark occurrences through an eye-opening regional round-up.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor: Alexander Voccia
Copy Editor: Denise Balgobin
Publication Design: Blaine Marcano

Please see our contact details on the back cover of this magazine

International Days

6 April

International Day of Sport for Development and Peace

7 April

World Health Day

22 April

International Mother Earth Day

23 April

International Girls in ICT Day

26 April

World Intellectual Property Day

Upcoming Meetings

3 April

Economic and Social Council, Partnership forum - New York

20 - 27 April

United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 14th session - Kyoto



SNEAK PREVIEW ARTICLE

Look out for more
in upcoming issues!



Economic impact of COVID-19 in the Caribbean

As the world grapples with the impact of one of the worst health challenges to face humanity in decades, governments across the Caribbean are implementing strategies to prevent, contain, mitigate and manage the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its consequences.

ECLAC Caribbean, together with the United Nations system and key regional organizations, has embarked on a careful assessment to estimate the economic and social impact of the virus on the economies of the subregion. The study will serve as a resource to inform governments' decision-making with respect to policy options.

The Novel Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, is affecting the way of life of Caribbean people

and is expected to have a major impact on the economies of the subregion. As many Caribbean countries are shouldering an unsustainable public debt, the impact of the fallout in government revenue and the expected increase in social expenditure will have to be carefully assessed.

This analysis being prepared by ECLAC Caribbean will ascertain the likely impact of the pandemic on the economies of the subregion as a whole. Entitled 'Economic Impact of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus in the Caribbean', the study will provide estimates of the economic cost of policy actions that have been taken in response to COVID-19.

The analysis will focus on select sectors, namely: health; tourism; agriculture, including fisheries

and livestock; education; transportation, with a focus on aviation and shipping; retail and distribution, and energy with special attention to oil and gas. For each sector, the impact assessment will present the socioeconomic costs related to loss of revenue, additional expenditures, temporary unemployment and the general welfare of households as a result of COVID-19.

The study is expected to become publicly available by mid May 2020. ■



Barbados working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Barbados is actively playing its role in ensuring increased efforts towards reducing levels of global greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade in order to minimize the worst impacts of climate change. This was indicated by Environment Minister, Trevor Prescod, as he addressed the second annual meeting of the Caribbean Cooperative Measurement, Reporting and Verification Hub (CCMRVH).

Held recently at Hilton Barbados Resort, the Forum was attended by representatives and technical experts from CARICOM countries and international and regional organizations. Outlining some of the work his government is doing, Prescod said, "At present, we are looking at alternative energy programmes across Barbados and the Prime Minister is placing great emphasis on that."

He added, "We have a programme which we intend to reach, even with the challenges of the climate, because this is probably one of the most

severe dry seasons in a considerable time in Barbados. We are planting over one billion trees across the landscape within the year 2020 and I can give you the assurance that we will achieve the objectives."

Prescod also told the gathering that "2020 must be another significant year for addressing climate action." He stated the day's CCMRVH event was "an opportunity for the region to build the needed capacity in the fight against climate change and not only as an exercise to facilitate reporting to the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] UNFCCC."

He expressed a wish to see the element of innovation brought into the day's discussions as attendees deliberate on the activities to be undertaken, and this exercise should be the vehicle for achieving such. ■

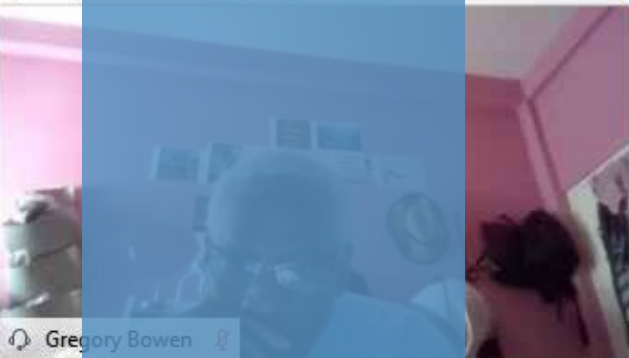
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Alicia Barcena



DQUARLESS



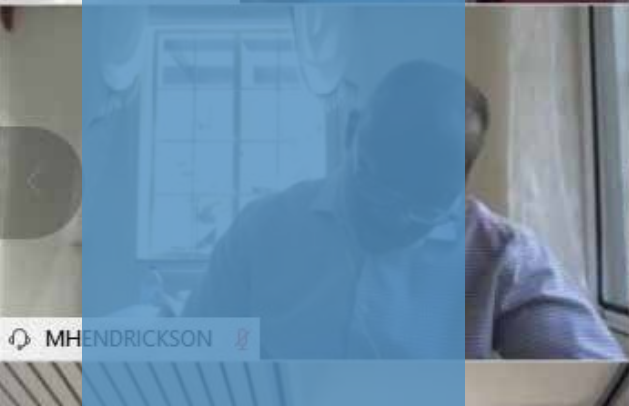
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Jimena Arias Feijoo



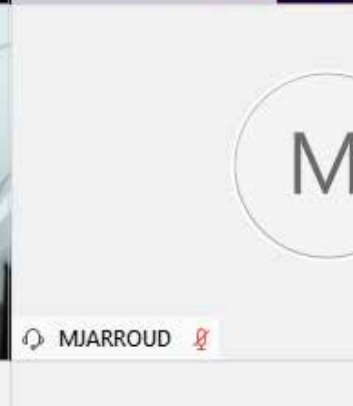
Kenneth Jefferson



MHENDRICKSON



michael.joseph



MJARROUD

The Hummingbird



CARIBBEAN HEADS OF STATE AND FINANCE MINISTERS

meet ECLAC's Executive Secretary,
Alicia Bárcena



Borrowing cannot be the solution for Caribbean countries to address the COVID-19 crisis. Instead, what is urgently needed is access to concessional funding and debt relief. This, according to ECLAC's Executive Secretary, Alicia Bárcena, who presided over a videoconference that discussed the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across the subregion on 28 April 2020.

[READ MORE](#) 

Caribbean Heads of State and Finance Ministers meet ECLAC's Executive Secretary, to analyze debt relief proposals and other measures to fight the effects of COVID-19

Moderated by ECLAC Caribbean Director, Diane Quarless, the virtual meeting brought together Prime Ministers, Premiers, Finance Ministers, Financial Secretaries and other high-level government representatives from 15 Caribbean countries, along with heads of Caribbean regional organizations and representatives of other UN agencies.

In her welcome remarks to the Caribbean authorities, Bárcena emphasized that “we find ourselves in very challenging times. There can be no doubt that COVID-19 will have a profound and lasting impact on the welfare of our countries and our

region for the next several months. We are putting the Caribbean first in everything we do”.

The Executive Secretary's words were echoed by the concerns expressed by the high-level decision makers in attendance, all of whom underscored the highly vulnerable economic situation that the countries of the subregion are currently facing. “The economic burden for our countries has been unsustainable because of the high levels of debt. We don't have the capacity for printing money and our policy instruments are very limited”, stressed Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston

Browne.

In the face of these challenges, Bárcena commended the subregion's senior decision makers for “putting the health and wellbeing of their populations first”. However, these efforts notwithstanding, ECLAC's Executive Secretary recognized that they had “come at a very high cost, particularly in your subregion, which already suffers a high level of vulnerability to both climatic and economic shocks, and with many of your economies already shouldering debt that is still very heavy, even with progress made to reduce external debt levels in recent years”.



“

The ECLAC's resilience fund proposal has the potential to offer much needed long-term relief particularly to middle income countries...

- Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary, ECLAC

”

Moreover, given the severe constraints being faced to service debt payments in the current circumstances, countries urged ECLAC's support to engage with the international community for better access to grants and concessional financing. Proposals advanced during the meeting included that consideration be given to having credit extended to countries which have already invested in green technology, that financial instruments such as the IMF Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) remain available and unchanged during these challenging times, and that other innovative instruments such as that offering debt forgiveness to countries impacted by the EBOLA epidemic in Africa be considered in these similar circumstances created by COVID-19.

The Honourable Camillo Gonsalves, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, Sustainable Development and Information Technology of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines also intimated that urgent practical interventions are needed to deal with liquidity challenges, before they become issues of solvency, and urged ECLAC to support new financing instruments for the Small Vulnerable Economies of the Caribbean.

In response, Alicia Bárcena reassured the subregion that the dialogue's results and key messages will be delivered to the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres,

to be considered in his platform of advocacy on behalf of small island, middle income countries in his engagement with the international financial community for support.

In addition, the Executive Secretary also stressed that relief for debt service payments can be extremely useful to supporting financing needs. In this regard, she emphasized that the crisis induced by COVID-19 underscores the importance of ECLAC's proposal for building resilience and reducing debt. ECLAC's proposal links building resilience to debt reduction and recommends the creation of the Caribbean Resilience Fund (CRF), with a view to the creation of a globally coordinated debt deleveraging mechanism with a climate component to address the global debt overhang problem: standstills and debt moratorium.

“The ECLAC's resilience fund proposal has the potential to offer much needed long-term relief particularly to middle income countries. Acceleration of the debt swap initiative and establishment of the ECLAC Climate Resilience Fund is needed, given the impact of the pandemic and the potential for an active hurricane season in 2020”, she said.

“It is urgent that there be effective coordination and interaction between multilateral institutions, donor countries, and small States debtor countries. Member States will require

flexible support from multilateral institutions, including lines of emergency financing”, she insisted.

These statements came on the heels of ECLAC's latest projections, according to which GDP growth in the Caribbean is expected to drop in 2020 by -2.5%, with a downward bias, while countries are spending between 1% and 4% of GDP to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, Caribbean economies have the highest debt ratios in the world, averaging 68.5% of GDP in 2019. Reductions in production and income along with increases in borrowing will further rise debt burdens. Moreover, debt is rooted in external shocks, compounded by the impact of natural disasters and inherent social and economic structural weaknesses.

In closing the high-level event, Bárcena reassured the Caribbean dignitaries that “we are part of this. A game plan for the short term is needed and we have to work on this, together with CARICOM, ACS and OECS. We will continue to advocate for this debt relief, for grants, for concessional funding for the Caribbean countries. And we will make sure that we can all address these issues with one voice, expressed clearly and openly. We heard you loud and clear”. ■

COVID-19: Caribbean Update

COVID-19, also known as the novel corona virus, has landed in the Caribbean – and is making its presence felt.

been expanded and being provided for those in the informal sector. In addition, the Anguilla Tourist Board (ATB) has announced a new social strategy that reflects and addresses the current situation in Anguilla. The upcoming series of posts is designed to surprise and delight audiences, building community and connections through their digital channels, with heartfelt messages to make people feel supported, valued and loved. The content being created will be either informative, inspirational or educational.

In Antigua and Barbuda, the government of has decided that all persons who are to be quarantined for a minimum of 14 days will be placed in a government-controlled facility, since the risk of community spread is too great when home quarantine is allowed. Meanwhile, the lockdown continues but with greater freedoms on exercise, banks and some businesses. To mitigate the unprecedented impacts on the economy, especially on the tourism sector which has halted the employment of approximately 20,000 people, a majority of which are women, the Government has distributed about 4,000 packages to families in need over the last three weeks. In the month of May, this initiative will be in its second phase and it is expected that a voucher system for food would be implemented. In addition, the Government has partnered with farmers who are currently using their own farm space to increase seedling production for distribution in communities. Over the last couple of

With many countries taking rapid action across the Caribbean to address the COVID-19 crisis, The Hummingbird presents its readers with a sampling of circumstances and efforts that are taking place across the sub region.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND INTERVENTIONS

In Anguilla, all regulations restricting movement and gatherings have been removed, following a declaration that there are no active or suspected cases of COVID-19. Meanwhile, there is an unemployment benefit for working person who lost their job due to COVID-19. Public assistance programmes have also

weeks, over 15,000 seedlings of various food crops for backyard gardening have been distributed.

In the Bahamas, Deputy prime minister Peter Turnquest announced that the government has lost at least 70% of its revenue during the period since emergency lockdown measures were implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19. To date, nearly 30,000 people have applied for unemployment assistance. Moreover, many business operators in the country have been forced to lay off thousands of employees as social distancing orders, a national curfew and the mandated closure of all non-essential businesses have brought the economy to a standstill. In response, the Government has made arrangements with various banks to defer all loan payments, and has offered a Stimulus Package for small businesses to continue to pay salaries or part thereof to their employees. A Government Order has also been issued prohibiting landlords to evict any tenant at this time.

In Barbados, COVID-19 has crushed the tourism industry, accounting for the loss of 5,000 hotel workers' jobs and the shuttering of nearly nine out of ten hotels. According to the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association, this is the industry's worst crisis ever. As a result, with some 14,000 people having already claimed unemployment benefits since the outbreak of COVID-19. The President of the Barbados Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Trisha Tannis, has forecasted more layoffs in the

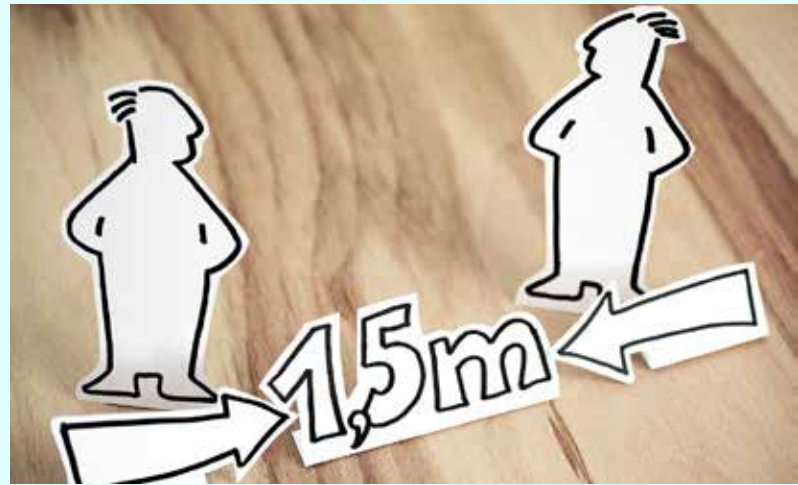
coming months. In response to these challenges, Prime Minister Mia Mottley has unveiled an "unprecedented" \$2 billion economic plan over the next two years to prop up the economy. The PM announced that the economic plan would focus on a public and private capital works programme (PPP), increasing the island's self-sufficiency, the creation of a Barbados Tourism Fund and \$210 million to be spent on families affected by the shutdown. "This is the biggest package of spending initiatives ever rolled out over a two-year period on a supplemental basis from what we would otherwise have as our core activities", she has stated.

In Bermuda, benefits have already been paid to just over 5,000 persons at a total cost of approximately \$8 million.

In the British Virgin Islands, the government has launched an economic stimulus plan which will serve as the interim framework to guide government's social, economic and fiscal response to the immediate and short-term needs of the Territory.

In the Cayman Islands a phased reopening of the domestic economy is expected to begin on Monday, 4 May, after encouraging results from hundreds of screening tests for COVID-19.

In Dominica, a programme has been developed for assistance to be given to elderly persons, in which trained personnel visit their homes. In addition, there are specific allowances



for persons above seventy years of age and those in the informal sector. Assistance has also been provided for housing, distributing masks and extra food, including for children who previously benefitted from the school feeding programme, who will still be provided with access to food packages.

In the Dominican Republic, economist and Vice-dean of the Faculty of Economics of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), Antonio Ciriaco Cruz, stressed that the Dominican economy may recover thanks to domestic sectors such as agriculture, once the health crisis caused by the coronavirus ends.

In Grenada, the government has prepared a stimulus package, announced in March, which seeks to mitigate the economic fallout from the global pandemic through 14 measures which include the provision of payroll support for hotels, bars and restaurants and small travel agents, as well as income support for public bus operators, taxi drivers, tourist vendors and persons in other such hospitality-based businesses. In particular, the Government is providing payroll support for former tourism employees to cover a percentage of their salary, as well as care packages with food and cleaning supplies. The Government is also providing extra food cards for those students who would have been given lunches in school through the School Feeding Programme, and has made it a priority to ensure that as many households as possible have internet to facilitate online classes for

all students.

In Guyana, over 1,700 households have benefitted so far from social relief which was provided by the government, through the Civil Defence Commission (CDC), as a means of ensuring that no Guyanese citizen is left hungry.

In Haiti, the government, until now focused on investing mostly in the repressive apparatus, has intervened by closing down the schools and factories, ports, airports and borders, and imposing a curfew from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. This is how it is trying to stem the pandemic, through a prevention-oriented approach, taking into account the manifest inadequacy of the healthcare system, with hospitals and clinics mostly decrepit, poorly equipped and often affected by the strikes of medical staff.

In Jamaica, the government is creating a "tourism recovery task force" in a bid to help this key industry recover from the coronavirus pandemic. The task force has been mandated to "provide a recovery and growth stimulation framework for the sector," according to a statement from the Ministry of Tourism. Meanwhile, the government has sought access to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI). In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture says that it will be spending J\$100-million on a programme aimed at mitigating the impact of drought on farmers so as to secure at least a five-per cent increase in food production. Furthermore, care

packages have been sent to families, extra support has been given to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. The Ministry of education has increased learning through media along with trying to improve internet access to all students. Those who were on the school feeding programmes have been provided with assistance as well as nutritional programmes for the food to be delivered to homes. Homeless persons have also been given meals.

In Martinique, the French government plans to reopen schools on 11 May 2020. However, the teachers' unions are demanding measures to protect the health and safety of students, teachers, and their families. Meanwhile, humanitarian and charitable organisations have been providing relief aid to prostitutes amid the current COVID-19 crisis. The organisations are providing the prostitutes with baskets of necessities and hygiene products, every week.

In Montserrat, the Social Services Department has implemented a shopping service in partnership with the Red Cross volunteers who shop and deliver groceries and medication to vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and the elderly.

In Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Government has embarked on the distribution of seedlings to families and additional support to farmers, as well as food packages and hot lunches to vulnerable persons. Psychosocial support is being provided by the Counselling Unit in the Ministry in



COVID-19: Caribbean Update *(continued)*

partnership with the Red Cross Society. In Saint Lucia, the Government is providing a response package that consists of psychosocial support, income and security. The first phase of the National Meals Programme (NMP) started on Sunday 12 April, with over 10,000 meals being delivered to the less fortunate. NMP is part of the government's Social Stabilization Programme, launched in response to the negative social impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus disease on Saint Lucia.

In Sint Maarten, food packages have been distributed to persons currently on the Ministry's social welfare list, which include the elderly and those persons taking care of others in need. To date, the Ministry has distributed approximately 5000 packages and will continue over the next weeks. Donations have also been made to soup kitchens, churches and other charities that supply hot meals in the communities. A financial stimulus package will soon be on stream for those

persons who have become unemployed. The Government will also offer to employers who request grants to pay 50% to 80% of salary to their staff.

In Suriname, the Ministry of Social Affairs is working on a programme for income support for those persons who would have lost their jobs as a result of the virus.

In Trinidad and Tobago, on 18 March 2020, the Cabinet approved a three-month advance to the beneficiaries of grants from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, which is responsible for the vulnerable population and provides grants to more than 160,000 households per month on a normal basis. New social transfers and grants such as food grants and rental assistance for those persons who would have been retrenched or have a reduction in income due to COVID-19, have also been introduced. Additionally, the National Insurance Board has been providing a salary relief

grant for the next 3 months of TT \$1 500 per month, to persons registered with them. Furthermore, families with children who benefitted from the school feeding programme have been receiving food support for 3 months if they are not already in receipt of a food card. A new shelter for the homeless has been opened. Looking ahead, the Government has also established a Recovery Team to devise a recovery plan for the country to determine how to move forward.

In Turks and Caicos Islands, the Government implemented stimulus packages, geared towards self-employed individuals and caregivers. A total of 1200 USD will be provided to each person.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND REGIONAL RESPONSES

On 15 April 15, the World Bank activated US\$6.6 million to provide immediate funding for Dominica's emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on enhancing health system capacity and strengthening food security; activated US\$4.5 million on April 17 to provide immediate funding for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, aimed at strengthening the capacity of the health system; and provided US\$10.5 million to Saint Lucia on 30 April to support the country's efforts to address the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has made available to the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic nearly US\$1.7 billion in additional funding for 2020 to confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

The IMF has approved immediate debt service relief to 25 of the IMF's member countries under the IMF's revamped Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) as part of the Fund's response to help address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The list of countries includes Haiti.

In Anguilla, the Health Authority the UK Government has agreed an emergency grant of US\$1.5 million. This will assist in meeting costs of establishing the



FOR MORE INFO AND THE LATEST UPDATES:

Governments' websites on measures taken to fight COVID-19:

- Anguilla: <http://www.gov.ai/covid.php> and <https://beatcovid19.ai/>
- Antigua and Barbuda: https://ab.gov.ag/detail_page.php?page=42
- Aruba: https://www.overheid.aw/news/news_47033/item/crisis-measures-by-the-government-of-aruba-in-connection-with-coronavirus-covid-19_48509.html
- Bahamas: https://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/!ut/p/b1/04_Sj9CPykyssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGjzOKNDdx9HR1NL-HzdTQ3MDDxDA3wcA8w9jPy9jYAKIoEKDHAARwNC-sP1o_AqMTGAKs-BjhZ9Hfm6qfkFuhEGWiaMiALGJzU0!/dl4/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/
- Barbados: <http://www.gov.bb/coronavirus>
- Bermuda: <https://www.gov.bm/coronavirus>
- British Virgin Islands: <https://bvi.gov.vg/covid-19>
- Cayman Islands: <http://www.gov.ky/portal/page/portal/cighome/pressroom/archive/March%202020/Coronavirus%20Update%2024%20March%202020>
- Cuba: <https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/>
- Curaçao: <https://gobiernu.cw/corona-virus-ultimo-notisianan/>
- Dominica: <http://dominica.gov.dm/corona>
- Dominican Republic: <https://presidencia.gob.do/>
- French Guiana: <http://www.guyane.gouv.fr/Politiques-publiques/Sante/Coronavirus-Covid-19/COVID-19-Points-de-situation/Point-de-situation-n-12-4-nouveaux-cas-Deplacements-interdits-entre-21h00-et-5h00-du-matin>
- Grenada: <https://www.mgovernance.net/moh/covid-19-education-material>
- Guadeloupe: <http://www.guadeloupe.gouv.fr/Politiques-publiques/Risques-naturels-technologiques-et-sanitaires/Securite-sanitaire/Informations-coronavirus/Coronavirus-Une-nouvelle-attestation-de-deplacement-de-rogatoire>
- Guyana: <https://dpi.gov.gy/category/news/government/>
- Jamaica: <https://www.moh.gov.jm/covid-19-update-march-24-2020/>
- Martinique: <http://www.martinique.gouv.fr/Politiques-publiques/Environnement-sante-publique/Sante/COVID-19-informations-recommandations-points-de-situation-attestation-de-deplacement>
- Montserrat: <http://www.gov.ms/latest-on-the-coronavirus/>
- Puerto Rico: <http://www.salud.gov.pr/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>
- Saint Kitts and Nevis: <https://www.gov.kn/>
- Saint Lucia: <http://www.govt.lc/news/statement-on-scale-down-of-non-essential-services> and <http://www.govt.lc/news/covid-19-response-measures>
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: <http://health.gov.vc/health/index.php/c>
- Sint Maarten: <http://www.sintmaartengov.org/government/VSA/Health-Updates/NOVELCORONAVIRUS/Pages/default.aspx>
- Trinidad and Tobago: <http://news.gov.tt/content/trinidad-and-tobago-covid-19-novel-coronavirus-update-47#.Xnum0IhKg2w>
- Turks and Caicos Islands: <https://www.gov.tc/moh/coronavirus/>
- United States Virgin Islands: <https://doh.vi.gov/covid19usvi>



COVID-19: Caribbean Update *(continued)*

temporary isolation facility at Princess Alexandra Hospital; expanding and equipping PAH's laboratory to test for COVID-19; fast tracking the completion of the oxygen generating facility and purchasing pharmaceuticals.

The Bahamas and The Cayman Islands have confirmed that the United States government have seized critically needed medical supplies bound for their fight against the coronavirus, COVID-19.

In Barbados and Eastern Caribbean States, The UN system has set up an inter-agency task force – comprising the Pan-American Health Organization, the UN Development Programme, UNICEF and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and under the guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator. The task force has adopted a Preparedness and Response Plan for Eastern Caribbean nations.

In Cuba, the director of research at the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Dr Gerardo Guillen, says a clinical trial is now being held for a vaccine aimed at activating the immune system to combat COVID-19.

In the Dominican Republic, the Central Bank has sought access to the Rapid Financing Instrument of the IMF for some US\$650 million for a term of three to five years and at a rate of 1.5%.

Guyana is shortly expecting to receive some 30,000

masks and other essential equipment, including ventilators, from China to aid in the country's fight against the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

In Jamaica, Minister of Health and Wellness Dr Christopher Tufton has disclosed that test kit supplies for COVID-19 to Jamaica from the United States were blocked by that jurisdiction, and that the government is now awaiting supplies from other sources. He has also assured that there are adequate supplies of testing material in the island at this time. Meanwhile,

The U.S. Virgin Islands has received a \$7.8 million grant from the U.S. Interior Department through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act approved last week by Congress.

The government of Venezuela has donated medical equipment and supplies to Dominica to help in the battle against COVID-19, to the tune of 3,000 rapid COVID tests and 50 reagents for PCR machine testing. In addition, the government has also donated 3000 rapid test kits to St Vincent and the Grenadines, so that the country can carry out in-country testing for Covid-19.

Member countries of the G20 group of leading world economies have agreed to suspend debt payments owed to them by some of the world's poorest countries. The list of countries includes Haiti. ■



Culture advocates share traditions at US Virgin Island Folklife Festival

At the 29th annual Folklife Festival in Saint Thomas, culture advocate, Julian Frett, had a simple answer to the question of where he learned to make charcoal. "It's my culture!" he said.

Frett was one of dozens of Saint John citizens who demonstrated island traditions with school children, visitors and residents at "A Celebration of Sharing" during the Virgin Islands National Park's Folklife Festival held in March at the park's ballfield in Cruz Bay.

The charcoal Frett made fueled the coal pot on which Ecelma Sprauve baked dumb bread while chatting with old friends.

Golda Hermon, the National Park guide who organized the event, explained the theme "We sharing plenty for Folklife Festival 2020."

"Last year's festival was about healing. After Hurricane Irma, St. Croix and Puerto Rico blessed us with their help," Hermon said.

"We've been through a lot, now it's time to give back. We are sharing people."

Now in its 29th year, the Virgin Islands National Park has brought young and old together to celebrate Black History Month.

Julius E. Sprauve Jr. High School students chanted pep rally chants as they wove through traffic in Cruz Bay to arrive at the ballfield, and both the JESS Quadrille and the Hispanic Heritage Dancers performed at the festival; the Hispanic Heritage Dancers for the first time.

Special ferries brought students and young performers from St. Thomas schools, including the Ulla Muller Steel Panatics; Cancryn Quadrille Dancers, Drum Line and Choir; Sts. Peter and Paul Angels of Steel; BCB Flambo Combo and Band Boosters; CAHS Cultural Dancers; Holy Family Quadrille; and Kean High Heritage Dancers.

Hermon said she was gratified to see children and teachers move

to various booths with notebooks in hand. She said when she invites vendors to participate, she tells them, "It's for the children." Festival goers had a chance to sample traditional foods like kallaloo and freshly cut sugar cane.

Storyteller Glen "Kwabena" Davis showed students how to grind seasoning for meat and fish using a mortar and pestle made by woodworker Avelino Samuel. Retired Park Ranger Edmund Roberts demonstrated how to make brooms which longtime residents Barbie Devine and Sherri Draper happily purchased.

Geneva Paris explained the purpose of old-time artifacts, including iron hooks used to attach boxes to a donkey's saddle. These boxes were used to transport everything, including young children to school or church.

Visitors to the festival were entertained by drummers, moko jumbies, DJs, bamboula dancers, martial arts experts and musicians. ■

SNEAK PREVIEW ARTICLE

Look out for more
in upcoming issues!



Innovation in Disaster Risk Mitigation in the Caribbean

Caribbean countries face vulnerabilities that include high exposure to the devastating impact of climate change and natural disasters. At the same time, heavy indebtedness and serious structural and fiscal constraints limit their ability to make adequate investments in climate change adaptation and risk mitigation. As a result, the subregion anticipates with great anxiety the advent of the hurricane season every year which threatens the long-term environmental, economic and social development of Caribbean countries, further compounding their high levels of public debt, limited capacity to mobilize domestic resources and increased dependence on external financing.

Given this reality, ECLAC Caribbean is preparing a study that will analyze technology uses and investigate innovative approaches to disaster and risk management (DRM) in the subregion to promote resilience

building and risk mitigation.

A variety of technologies, including communication tools for early warning systems and innovative approaches to involving communities in risk assessments, can be used to support the practice of DRM in times of crisis, as well as in planning for disaster and in post event reconstruction. They can be important enablers for sustaining informed decision-making and in building resilience by providing the tools and methods to assist in the adaptation and recovery processes. However, strong institutions, local and regional capacity, cooperation and incentives are needed to translate research into applicable solutions.

Innovation in climate-resilience includes integrating data on current and expected changes in climate patterns into decision-making tools and approaches aimed at making people better prepared to anticipate,

adapt and absorb potential impacts. Examples feature improved farming techniques, new models for credit access and savings schemes, participatory planning and new forms of access to and distribution of information.

Importantly, the study analyzes some of the innovative ideas coming from grassroots movements and local business. It also assesses how easily accessible communication technologies, such as text messaging, continue to play a critical role in disaster preparedness and management.

By analyzing the Caribbean approach to using innovative strategies and technologies, the study proposes the development of a repository of best practices for disaster and risk management in the subregion.

The study will be available later this year. ■



The government of Jamaica is building shelters for battered women

The Jamaican government has prioritized the construction of shelters for battered women, as part of its efforts to support victims of gender-based violence.

According to JIS News, the administration of Prime Minister Andrew Holness will establish three national centers for women across the island.

Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports, Olivia Grange, recently gave the Parliament an update on the development of shelters for battered women, saying that work on the first facility is in its final stage.

Grange confirmed that the first shelter will begin operations in the first half of this fiscal year. She said that the Jamaican cabinet recently signed the purchase of two other shelters for the western and eastern regions of the country. In this regard, Prime Minister Holness said a few days ago that his government has been transparent in its efforts and is working to fix years of lack of investment in national security for fighting crime and gender violence. ■



Sustainable ocean management in the Caribbean

Recognizing the importance of the ocean and its resources to small island developing states (SIDS), ECLAC Caribbean is undertaking relevant research in anticipation of the UN conference on Oceans, scheduled for later this year.

The 'Caribbean inBrief for the 2020 Ocean's Conference' will highlight Caribbean trends and priorities for ocean and ocean resources management.

It will include perspectives on how Caribbean SIDS may benefit from this landmark Conference, emerging ideas for ocean management in keeping with the UN Decade for Ocean Science, and opportunities for partnerships in the areas of research, technology and innovation.

The Ocean Conference comes at a critical time as the world is strengthening its efforts to mobilize, create and drive solutions to realize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

As one of the first milestones of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' newly launched Decade of Action for the SDGs, the Conference will propel much needed science-based innovative solutions aimed at starting a new chapter of global ocean action.

Solutions for a sustainably managed ocean involve clean, low carbon technology and innovative uses of marine resources. They also call for addressing the threats to health, ecology, economy and governance of the ocean – which include acidification, marine litter and pollution, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the loss of habitats and biodiversity.

The policy brief will be published in advance of the Conference. ■



T&T last hope for leatherback turtles

A global report on the leatherback sea turtle population has downgraded the species to critically endangered and this country's nesting sites may be the only thing that saves them from extinction.

The Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) report shows alarming trends globally where once-popular leatherback nesting sites are showing a precipitous decline in turtle numbers. According to the report in French Guiana, the turtle population decreased by 99%, while in the Pacific, the return of leatherbacks to those nesting sites have dropped by 78%.

Dr Reia Guppy, an assistant professor at the University of Trinidad and Tobago's Marine Sciences Department said this puts a lot of responsibility on this country.

"The general trend has been an overall decline

where Trinidad is perhaps the last major site of leatherbacks perhaps even in the world because the Pacific population has collapsed and the Caribbean population is beginning to collapse."

Dr Guppy noted that Trinidad and Tobago is therefore observing the arrival of leatherbacks that previously would go to other territories such as Cuba and Nova Scotia. She believes that certain factors might be responsible for not only driving the population downwards but also for bringing them to our shores.

Dr Guppy has also alluded to a population decline at nesting sites here in Trinidad. "For example, Grand Riviere is one of our largest nesting sites. For the last five years or so, normally you'd see two hundred or three hundred turtles at any given hour. About three years ago there was a massive decline; you'd be hard-pressed to get fifty in one night." ■

STATE *of* AFFAIRS



Dominica

GOVERNMENT AND WORLD BANK AGREEMENT

- Mar 4 -

The Government of the People's Republic of China has donated ventilators and forehead thermometers to the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica to be used in the fight against COVID-19. The donation, done through the Chinese Embassy to Dominica is the second batch of equipment to arrive from China.

The first batch of equipment included 536 nucleic acid test kits and 30,000 surgical masks which were donated by the Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation from China.

EMBASSY IN ABU DHABI

- Jan 30 -

The Commonwealth of Dominica recently opened an embassy in Abu Dhabi and its first in the entire Middle East.

Prime Minister of Dominica Dr Roosevelt Skerrit inaugurated the embassy along with other dignitaries including Suhail bin Mohammed Faraj Faris Al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Industry; Saeed Abdullah Al Qamzi, Director of the Visits Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; Hubert Charles, Dominica's newly appointed ambassador to the UAE and embassy staff. The Dominican Embassy is placed at 13-B 2F, Plaza 30, 100 Al Ladeem Street, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.



Jamaica

NEW BUILDING FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- Feb 20 -

The Government of Jamaica has set aside JMD \$83.3 million to furnish the newly built Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade building, in downtown Kingston. Built on 11,700 square meters by the Jiangsu Jiangdu Construction Group Company Limited of China, the 11-storey structure contains office facilities for the Ministry's meetings and conferences, as well as, waiting areas for diplomats and other visitors. The project, which is slated to end in March 2021, is being financed by the Jamaican and the Chinese Governments.

US FUNDING

- Apr 6 -

The government of the United States has pledged US \$700,000 to the government of Jamaica to help in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak across the country. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the funds will go directly toward Jamaica's emergency response. The emergency response resource will support – Case management to strengthen clinical care while minimizing the risk of onwards transmission to others; Infection prevention and control in health care facilities, and laboratory strengthening to prepare systems for large-scale COVID-19 testing.



Trinidad and Tobago

VIRTUAL COURTS

- Apr 17 -

Twelve virtual courts will be introduced as part of the judiciary's operations under the current coronavirus (COVID-19) stay-at-home regulations in Trinidad and Tobago. The virtual court systems entail the use of shipping containers which were converted into courtrooms which would provide facilities for the virtual hearings. According to the Attorney General, Faris Al-Rawi, the virtual courts will be able to deal with maximum sentences, judge-alone trials, bail hearings, remand appearances and other charge matters.

PARACETAMOL FROM INDIA

- Apr 19 -

The Foreign Ministry of the Government of India will export more than US \$250,000 of Paracetamol API to Trinidad and Tobago. The Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) is the part of any drug that produces the intended effects. The decision was made on humanitarian grounds by the Indian Government to ensure the supply of the medicine that has a multitude of uses including the treatment of COVID-19 cases. According to a statement from the Indian Government, Trinidad and Tobago is among 63 countries, spread all over the globe, for which the export of the medicine has been approved as part of India's effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECLAC CARIBBEAN *Family*

International Women's Day rally

Hundreds of people marched around the Queen's Park Savannah, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, to mark International Women's Day 2020, which was commemorated globally on 8 March. Among them was ECLAC Caribbean's Library Assistant, Tricia Blackman.

Following the march, the group gathered to demand action against gender-based violence and to promote women's rights. They talked, exchanged information, networked, and listened to speeches from civil society leaders, government officials, diplomats, and representatives from international organizations.

The day's activities took many forms, including art and entertainment. Participants had a chance to march to the beats of a rhythm section playing live on the road and to soca tunes from a music truck, as well as to listen to powerful spoken word performances and lively but profound calypso lyrics.

Here are some photographic memories from that day. ■



Photos courtesy of the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator



ECLAC team conducts scoping mission in Antigua and Barbuda

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda will soon receive technical assistance from ECLAC Caribbean for a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) sensitization workshop, as part of the 12th tranche of ECLAC's latest Development Account Project.

During a scoping mission, carried out in the country from 4 to 6 March 2020, a team from ECLAC Caribbean concluded that sensitization of persons in Antigua and Barbuda to the SDGs is important. The mission was organized to assess progress in implementation of the SDGs, and to discuss plans for the nation's Voluntary National Review (VNR) on its status of SDG implementation.

A number of strategies were suggested to bolster implementation of the SDGs, including the appointment of an SDG champion in each Government Ministry, who would serve as a focal point to administer the sensitization process at the Ministry level. It was also proposed that a communication strategy via cable and radio be used to educate and inform the general public. This strategy would also seek to appeal to the younger segment of the population, in order to promote wider knowledge of the SDGs in schools and learning institutions.

To complement these efforts, ECLAC Caribbean and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda propose to carry out

an SDG sensitization workshop over three days, at a date to be announced. With Permanent Secretaries acting as workshop facilitators, the exercise would focus on ensuring public sector knowledge of the SDGs, and solid engagement with private sector and civil society.

During the scoping mission, the Government also indicated interest in having ECLAC Caribbean initiate the process of Antigua and Barbuda's first Voluntary National Review (VNR), to be presented in 2021 at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the United Nation's Headquarters in New York. ■



Recipe Corner: Simple White Bean Soup With Spinach

This is a special recipe on cooking healthy meals while home sheltering during the novel coronavirus outbreak. With restaurants shut down and people home sheltering, there has never been a better time to cook. The other consideration is that good health is the best defense at any time, but particularly with the news continuing to report that in general, the most severe cases of COVID-19 are visited upon the already ill and sadly, the elderly.

For this unusual time we are living in, here are two recipes for you to try.

Ingredients:

- Large onion chopped
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Several cloves of garlic (3 or more, to taste)
- 1 or more sprig of rosemary
- 2 or 3 large bay leaves
- 6 cups vegetable stock
- ½ cup quinoa (or brown rice)
- Large carrot diced
- 6 oz or so of baby spinach or other chopped greens
- 1 – 15 oz can white cannellini beans or other white bean

Directions:

1. In large soup pot or Dutch oven, sauté onion until softened. Add the garlic after the onions are softened. Garlic tends to burn quickly so only a few minutes with that.
2. Add the rosemary, bay leaves, stock, grain, chopped carrot and any other diced veggies and rinsed beans.
3. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook for as long as the grain you have chosen requires. When the grain is tender, remove bay leaves and rosemary stalks.
4. Stir the spinach or other green into the hot soup. When the greens are wilted add salt and ground pepper to taste.
5. This soup is lovely with some grated Parmesan or Romano cheese on top.



DIANE'S CORNER

The Director's views and thoughts on the occasion of:

International Mother Earth Day

22/03



Today we greet International Mother Earth Day in unprecedented circumstances. The world is in the grip of a pandemic that has forced us to pause and reflect on our stewardship in protecting the many gifts we receive from Mother Earth; gifts we have exploited and heedlessly depleted, draining Gaia's power to maintain harmony and balance in nature. Illness and disease are stark symptoms of such imbalance in nature.

Let us use this day to celebrate and give thanks for the bountiful gifts that we have been granted by Mother Earth, especially in our corner of paradise, the Caribbean. More importantly, going forward, let us reflect on how we respect, protect and consume these gifts sustainably, so that future generations may also enjoy their beauty, abundance and splendour

#DirectorsTake

<http://vrb.al/directors-take>



Vegan Banana Bread

What you will need:

- 1 tablespoon finely ground flax seed
- 3 tablespoons water
- 3 medium overly ripe bananas, mashed
- 1 apple, finely chopped or grated
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2¼ cups almond flour, or any other flour will work
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup chopped pecans

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease and lightly flour a standard loaf pan and set aside.
2. In a bowl, mix banana, apple, ground flax, water raisins and vanilla.
3. In a separate bowl, combine almond flour, baking soda, sea salt, cinnamon and chopped pecans.
4. Combine both mixtures and stir until well incorporated.
5. Pour batter into greased loaf pan. Bake for 45-50 minutes. (It may take longer, so check doneness in center at 50 minutes to see if it springs back when pushed on).



CONTACT US

ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean,
1 Chancery Lane, P.O. Box 1113,
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago,
West Indies.

MEDIA CONTACT

Tel.: 1 868 224 8075

E-mail: media-pos@eclac.org

SOCIAL MEDIA



<https://www.cepal.org/en/headquarters-and-offices/eclac-caribbean>

