

TERMS OF REFERENCE
THE COVID-19 AND OTHER PUBLIC
HEALTH EMERGENCIES AND
EMERGING DISEASES ASEAN
RESPONSE FUND

Introduction

1. The outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. In response to the outbreak of the disease in the region, ASEAN Leaders agreed to the establishment of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund to address both the immediate needs and long-term goals of ASEAN Member States arising from the pandemic.

Objectives

2. The COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund ('Fund') shall serve as a pool of financial resources to provide support to ASEAN Member States in the detection, control and prevention of COVID-19 transmission and in protecting the safety of medical professionals, healthcare workers, frontline workers, and the wider population from ASEAN Member States. The Fund may also be utilised for the purpose of responding to other public health emergencies and emerging diseases.
3. The Fund shall be made equally accessible to all ASEAN Member States for the purpose of, among others, procuring necessary medical supplies and equipment which may include but are not limited to the following items:
 - a. Test kits/diagnostic tools;
 - b. Personal Protective Equipment, including gloves, medical masks, goggles, face shields, and gowns, etc.;
 - c. Essential medical supplies, including medicines and vaccines;
 - d. Other medical supplies and equipment for diagnostic and treatment procedures.

Such items should be effective, safe to use, accessible and affordable.

4. The Fund shall also be made available to support cooperation in research and development relevant to COVID-19 and other emerging diseases, including research on virology, immunology, and other relevant studies, or research relevant to the development of medical treatments and preventive vaccines; technical support in the planning and implementation of containment and mitigation measures; sharing of best practices; as well as capacity and capability-building of health professionals and other frontline personnel.

Guiding Principles

5. The Fund shall be established and managed according to the following guiding principles:
 - a. The Fund shall be first established by an initial contribution of 10% from the ASEAN Development Fund and may also include voluntary contributions through the allocation of monies from existing ASEAN Plus One and ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Funds. This initial contribution shall be transferred to the Fund upon the entry into force of this Terms of Reference.
 - b. Thereafter, the Fund shall be open to voluntary contributions from ASEAN Member States, Dialogue Partners, Sectoral Dialogue Partners, Development Partners, and other external partners of ASEAN, including international organisations and funding agencies as well as public and private sectors. These contributions shall be made as grants, managed by the ASEAN Secretariat according to the terms laid out in this Terms of Reference.
 - c. Given the urgency in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ASEAN Member States, Dialogue Partners wishing to transfer their contributions from existing Trust Funds that are placed with the ASEAN Secretariat may engage in an exchange of letters to facilitate the transfer of fund in lieu of existing guidelines of the Trust Funds. An exchange of letters will also be conducted with other external partners wishing to contribute to the Fund. This exchange of letters will be conducted between the Secretary-General of ASEAN and the corresponding partner. This would also apply to future public health emergencies based on the urgency and gravity of the situation.

Arrangements for Managing and Utilising the Fund

Custody and Management of the Fund

6. The Fund shall be held in trust by the ASEAN Secretariat, and will be managed and administered in accordance with the ASEAN Secretariat Financial and Administrative Rules and Procedures with regard to disbursement, accounting, reporting, and auditing standards and processes.
7. The ASEAN Secretariat shall provide a half-yearly financial statement to the ASEAN Coordinating Council to update ASEAN Member States on the status of the Fund. One consolidated audited statement will be prepared by the ASEAN Secretariat yearly, reflecting the movement within the Fund as a whole; this statement will be made available to all contributing partners. The cost of the audit shall be borne by the Fund.

Funding Approval

8. In instances of immediate need to tap into the Fund, the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD) shall function as the reviewing and approving body to fast track the process for immediate release of the monies. Immediate needs of the Fund would include instances of procurement of medical supplies and equipment critical for diagnosis and treatment of patients, as outlined in the Objectives above. Requests for immediate need of the Fund will be presented to the SOMHD through a proposal following a template which will be provided by the ASEAN Secretariat.
9. Utilisation of the Fund for purposes of initiatives related to research and development in the aspects outlined in the Objectives of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund above shall be presented through a project proposal which will be first consulted with the ASEAN Secretariat, and thereafter presented to the SOMHD (and other sectors where relevant) for endorsement. Upon the endorsement of the SOMHD, approval for the utilisation of the fund shall be obtained from the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR). Project proposals shall follow the template which will be provided by the ASEAN Secretariat.

Utilisation of Remaining Funds

10. ASEAN may decide to terminate the access to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund when the threat of COVID-19 has receded from the region and use of the Fund will no longer be needed for purposes of providing support to ASEAN Member States in response to the pandemic or other public health emergencies and emerging diseases in the region.
11. The termination of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and the consequent utilisation of the unexpended balance shall be decided by the ASEAN Coordinating Council upon consultation with relevant bodies, including the SOMHD.

Entry into Effect

12. This Terms of Reference shall enter into effect upon the approval of the ASEAN Coordinating Council.
13. Amendments to the Terms of Reference may be made with the approval of the ASEAN Coordinating Council.

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