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**Joint CETAF-DiSSCo COVID-19 Taskforce**

**Urgent Call for contribution**

Brussels, 27 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

We are globally facing an unprecedented critical situation derived from the virus spread causing COVID-19 that is putting our lives at risk at a scale and virulence never encountered before in modern times. This health crisis requires a collective and immediate response from governments and citizens, researchers and professionals in finding prompt solutions. We live in an era of big data and connectivity, with advanced technologies that provide opportunities the world never had before to pool resources and knowledge together from all over the planet working towards the same invisible enemy.

In the light of cross-disciplinary effort, fair data exchange and international joint developments, natural sciences collections held in museums, botanical gardens and universities, are to play a role in helping health-related agencies in characterizing, mitigating the effects of and contributing to produce adequate responses to infectious diseases, as it has been the case for the devastating Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014. Although we are still uncertain on the origins of the SARS-Cov-2 and the disease it causes to humans (COVID-19), the scientific community has already strong indications that this is a zoonotic disease. Should this be the case, a better understanding of distribution, population ecology and inter-species interactions might be valuable to identify the origin and evolution of the virus and act accordingly [[1]](#footnote-1).

Collections-based research can add critical evidence to help solve this global health crisis.

Our community holds data, experience and skills that can contribute to find solutions more rapidly and effectively. The world needs your help as a scientist in the field (taxonomist, collections curator, etc.) and expert on origins and distribution of disease agents as well as of potential host and vector species transmitting SARS-Cov-2. Equally, from the perspective of bioinformatics, our community may provide support and access to important large data sets related to relevant species that now need to be clearly identified, studied and analyzed in the light of the current pandemic.

As a meaningful way to contribute to mitigate the spread of the disease and finally find solutions, we launch this urgent call to scientists across the CETAF membership and your colleagues in the broader DiSSCo landscape to form a task force that could devote the joint expertise and dedication to provide other relevant actors with the most adequate and timely information as might be valuable to push forward research for the discovery of answers to COVID-19. Our aim is to create by the end of next week, on the 3rd of April 2020, a **Taskforce of Experts** (the COVID-19 TaF) to collaborate with teams all over the world and be the contact point for whatever valuable data could be needed.

The urgency in flattening the curve of the infection trend and the severity with which this virus is already affecting large parts of our world regions requires our solidarity and help. We, from CETAF Secretariat working together with DiSSCo research infrastructure Coordination Office, will provide the support you may need in channeling your willingness to participate in this Task-Force, providing you the right contacts, mechanisms and tools to interoperate internationally with larger teams and synergetic initiatives (such as [VODAN](https://www.go-fair.org/implementation-networks/overview/vodan/), EU Health Policy Platform, RDA COVID-19 Working Group and others) and helping you in whatever you may need, also financially.

If you are able and willing to join forces with us, please respond to our call by filling the [attached form](https://www.cognitoforms.com/CETAF1/COVID19TaFACETAFDiSSCoJointAction) by next Wednesday 1 April 2020. We will soon contact you and give you information on next steps towards the organization of the COVID-19 TaF Taskforce.

We wish you and your closest keep safe and healthy.

With our best regards,

On behalf of CETAF and DiSSCo

1. See other references (DiEuliis et al, 2016 - <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1522680112>) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)