

Caribbean Reef Response and Resilience Initiative

The Problem

Why are Caribbean reefs a climate priority right now?

Coastal communities across the Caribbean depend on coral reefs for food, income, and protection from storms and flooding. But reefs face the same climate threats as the communities they protect, and reef degradation is accelerating.

What happens to reefs after a hurricane, and why does it matter?

Damaged reefs can die if there is no immediate rescue intervention. Once a reef is gone, so is the coastal protection and the livelihoods it supported. Marine managers are already stretched thin, and there is no dedicated system or funding to respond to reef damage in the critical days and weeks after a storm.

What can be done to protect reefs after a hurricane?

When a hurricane damages coral reefs, local responders can intervene by clearing debris, reattaching broken coral fragments, and stabilising affected areas before conditions deteriorate further. The science supporting these techniques continues to advance, and the results, when response is fast and well-coordinated, can be meaningful. But techniques alone are not enough. What is often missing is local capacity, coordination, and the fast, reliable funding needed to deploy those techniques in time. This initiative focuses on that: equipping local communities with the best available training, strengthening national coordination and response planning, and ensuring that dedicated people have funding the moment they need it.

The Solution

What is the Caribbean Reef Response and Resilience Initiative?

It is a program that builds the national systems Caribbean countries need to respond to reef damage after hurricanes: coordination frameworks, locally led response plans, and trained reef responders drawn from coastal communities. It connects national systems to a dedicated regional insurance mechanism, so money is available the moment it is needed. The initiative is led by the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund (CBF) and implemented through partner National Conservation Trust Funds (NCTFs) in four pilot countries – the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with the intention of expanding to other Caribbean nations as the model develops.

Why focus on hurricane risk specifically?

Reef threats are many, but not all of them lend themselves to the same solutions. Insurance works for some risks and not others, and hurricanes are a strong fit. They are discrete events, well-understood by science and the insurance industry, and can be modelled and priced at viable rates. There is also a clear link between a hurricane event and the immediate need for response funding, making insurance a practical and effective mechanism for mobilizing resources quickly. Other reef threats, such as bleaching, do not yet meet the conditions required for an insurable risk, but for hurricane damage, this approach genuinely works.

How does the insurance work?

1. The Caribbean Biodiversity Fund purchases the regional insurance policy before hurricane season.
2. A hurricane hits and meets pre-agreed thresholds, such as wind speed at a given location.

3. The parametric insurance policy pays out according to a pre-agreed calculation process using immediately available hazard data. No damage assessment required.
4. Funds are released immediately, while reefs can still be rescued.
5. Payouts flow through national conservation trust funds into coordinated reef response systems.
6. Money reaches trained responders on the ground, fast.

Isn't this just another conservation grant? How is insurance different?

Conservation is largely funded through time-limited grants tied to specific projects and outcomes. That model works well for planned, predictable work, but it has a genuine deficiency when it comes to shock events. Hurricane damage is immediate, and reallocating existing programme budgets to respond can derail priorities that took years to build. Emergency fundraising after a storm is slow and unpredictable. Parametric insurance fills that gap: it guarantees dedicated funding is available exactly when it is needed, without competing with ongoing conservation work or waiting for donors to respond.

Governance and Delivery

Who delivers this program?

The Caribbean Biodiversity Fund leads the initiative regionally, managing the insurance mechanism and supporting national systems. In each participating country, national reef response systems bring together the conservation organisations, government agencies, and local stakeholders best placed to coordinate response, reflecting each country's institutional landscape and existing networks. The NCTFs play a key role in this process, helping to distribute insurance payouts and connect the initiative to national systems. When a hurricane hits, local Reef Responders are the ones in the water.

What role do local communities play?

Local communities are central to the initiative. Reef response coordination, planning, and execution is locally led, with trained reef responders drawn from coastal communities — including divers, fishers, and others with strong water skills. The program partners with prominent local environmental organizations that have deep roots and proven track records.

Scale and Ambition

Is this a pilot, or is it already at scale?

This is an early-stage pilot, and deliberately so. The initiative does not arrive with a pre-built solution ready for rollout. Instead, it works alongside institutions and communities in each participating country to co-develop systems from the ground up. Testing and validating the model comes later. The first task is building it together. Success opens the door to broader coverage across the Caribbean and, ultimately, to similar models in other reef systems globally.

What does success look like?

Success means well-coordinated, well-resourced reef response systems that support the people working to conserve and restore reefs, strengthen shock-responsive marine area management, and deliver measurable environmental outcomes. It means trained local responders can access reliable financing and mobilise within days of a hurricane, before coral mortality accelerates and the window for rescue closes. And it means a validated, scalable model that closes the funding gap after hurricane damage to reefs, protecting the coastal communities, fisheries, and tourism economies that depend on them, with a replicable blueprint for using insurance as a serious tool in biodiversity and nature-based climate finance.