

# RESEARCH IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

## CONNECTING DEVELOPMENT, COMMERCIALISATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY



**DR DAVID RAMPERSAD**

Director  
Office of Research,  
Development and  
Knowledge Transfer,  
UWI, St Augustine Campus,  
Trinidad

It is generally accepted that research is an important driver of economic growth and development. Accordingly, research institutions are expected to advance knowledge creation and foster the critical thinking and policy advice necessary to stimulate economic development. Building on the foundations laid in the first half of the twentieth century through the work of institutions like the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, research in Trinidad and Tobago has flourished through the establishment of institutions of learning as well as the creation of a supportive policy framework.

Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have made significant strides in research over the course of the last century. We recall, for instance that, Dr Joseph Pawan discovered that vampire bats were responsible for transmitting rabies, that Dr Rudranath Capildeo gained international recognition for his work in applied Mathematics and Physics, while Dr Theodosius Poon King conducted seminal research in the field of diabetes.

The St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies has been the principal engine of national research since its establishment in 1960 and is well known for its strengths in all academic disciplines. The work of Professor Nazir Ahamad in Soils Science, Dr George Moon Sammy in Food Technology and Professor John Agard in the field of Climate Change, for instance, is noteworthy. The Cocoa Research Unit, the genesis of which can be traced to the 1930s, is recognised internationally for its outstanding research while individuals such as Professor Francis Cope undertook significant work in plant genetics, a tradition carried on by Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan. In addition to producing internationally recognised research, the UWI continues to train young researchers who are the future knowledge creators and innovators. It has led and participated in research consortia that

play a major role in creating new knowledge and attracting funding. Its Office of Research Development and Knowledge Transfer and the creation of a Research Information Management System that will drive the research agenda, ensure that its philosophy is transferred and that the results of its research are available to the wider society.

Other tertiary education institutions of more recent vintage also contribute to the research enterprise and the creation of knowledge. The importance of technology transfer was recognised by the establishment in 1971 of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) with a mandate to engage in research and development, innovation, and commercialisation. CARIRI has played an important role in providing solutions to the manufacturing industry and the service sector. An additional impetus has been provided by the Prime Minister's Awards for Innovation and Invention which recognise the contribution of innovation, invention, science and technology to the process of industrialisation and development.

Apart from the research conducted by tertiary level education institutions, government ministries have for decades been involved in research activities. These include, among others, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources through the Central Experimental Research Station at Centeno and the Forestry Division. Other public agencies such as the Institute of Marine Affairs and the Environmental Agency have also fostered research.

From the 1970s, as public policy recognised the growing importance of science and technology in the creation of a research-driven, knowledge-based society, budgetary allocations were provided and a framework established to foster science and technology, first through the establishment of the National Scientific Advisory Council in 1968 and subsequently the National Council for Technology and Development in 1976. A

significant development in this regard was the establishment of the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST) which began operations in 1979 with a mandate to promote the development of science, technology and higher education, and improve the innovative, creative and entrepreneurial capabilities of the population.

Research has been facilitated by a strong intellectual policy framework which protects inventors and governs the transfer of knowledge between parties. As a result of the accession of Trinidad and Tobago to various international conventions, beginning in 1964 with the Paris Convention on Intellectual Property, the passage of new supporting legislation, and the inclusion of Intellectual Property in international loan and trade agreements in the 1990s, it became necessary to establish an effective comprehensive system to grant and

enforce Intellectual Property rights. A project to modernise the Intellectual Property system was begun in 1994 and the Intellectual Property Office came into being in 1997 to oversee relevant legislation and regulations in all matters relating to Intellectual Property.

Public policy continues to support research and its application. Thus, the Medium Term Policy Framework 2011-2014 emphasises the creation of an information, technology-driven, innovative, knowledge-based and globally connected economy. To achieve this, a national innovation system which includes mechanisms for financing will be established; the protection of Intellectual Property and the links between research and development and commercialisation will be strengthened; and a research agenda that is supported by the re-orientation of education and resources towards science-based learning will be promoted. ■

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CARIRI technician conducts failure analysis using scanning electron microscope