

The role of C@ribNET in the preservation of and access to scientific and technical data in developing countries.

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The countries of the Caribbean Region represent a broad range of middle to low income developing countries that have historically been primary producers of agricultural output and minerals to the world economy. Consonant with the production of sugar, coffee, cocoa, bananas, bauxite and natural gas and oils, basic scientific research capabilities were developed alongside in the areas of climate, plant and animal breeding, feedstock, agricultural practices etc. Most of this research work has been vested in government-owned research institutes and laboratories. The larger portion of this valuable data exists in analogue format, resident in dusty filing cabinets and manila folders. Where digital data does exist, the format remains to be standardised and published so that it is network-facing and network-aware.

Coming on the founding of The University of the West Indies and, subsequently, several national institutions of tertiary education, an enviable record of research in tropical diseases and their curative regimes and medicines exist alongside socio-economic data representing a rich and diverse exploration of topics relevant to sustainable development. Much of this data is digital but 'siloes' and for the most part not readily accessible to research interests. As a result, the knowledge that could be made available in support of sustainable development still awaits probing assessment and evaluation.

C@ribNET, the research and education network being developed to connect Caribbean educational, research and other public institutions that are actors in the development agenda for the region intends to collate and bring these data resources online for easy accessibility to the global research and education community. In this way communities of practice can develop around the assessment and evaluation of this treasure-trove of scientific and technical data we deem useful to the sustainable social and economic development of the region.