

Prof Copeland:

T&T leads the way in cocoa tree research

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UNIVERSITY of the West Indies (The UWI) St Augustine Campus principal Prof Brian Copeland paid kudos to the Cocoa Research Centre (CRC) for leading the world in basic knowledge of the cocoa tree.

And the Mars chocolate company is funding a joint cocoa genome sequencing project, where the CRC/UWI has partnered with Stanford University, in the United States, and this project has received US\$200,000.

Copeland made these comments on Friday during a function for World Cocoa and Chocolate Day, at JFK Auditorium, St Augustine Campus.

Among those present were Agriculture Minister Clarence Rambharat; Trade and Industry Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon; Gilles Jerrit Bijl, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; and Jude Lee Sang of Montserrat Cocoa Farmers Co-operative Society Ltd (MCFCSL).

Tracing the cocoa research origins, Copeland said: "Some 77 years ago, the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, established here, began on a path that established a distinguished and globally-recognised track record in cocoa research. The times, 32 years before Independence, were different and the intent behind the then Cocoa Research Scheme was to provide long-range research not usually pursued by the agricultural departments of colonial governments.

"It was a unique arrangement since the financing for this initiative came from the governments of Ceylon, Gold Coast, Grenada, Nigeria, and Trinidad as well as chocolate manufacturers Cadbury, JS Fry, and Rowntree. It was perhaps one of the first successful examples of public/private sector partnership with aca-

demia here in Trinidad and Tobago. We are still actively promoting and preaching such partnerships in order to achieve sustainable regional development," he added.

Sharing more information on the cocoa tree initiative, Copeland said: "This country would lead the world in its scientific contribution of basic knowledge of the cocoa tree. Now known as the Cocoa Research Centre, CRC is the custodian of a germplasm collection, designated the International Cocoa Germplasm, Trinidad. A cocoa gene bank is a conservatory that keeps ancient and interesting cocoa varieties or genetic resources in a safe environment for posterity. Genes from a gene bank can be harnessed for many



SHARING KNOWLEDGE: Brian Copeland

commercial purposes but, more importantly in this hurricane-ravaged region, new cocoa varieties can be used to build resilience to climate change and disease.

"Our international cocoa germplasm is recognised by Bioversity International, CacaoNet (a global network for cacao genetic resources), and FAO Trust."

Moving to the Mars initiative, Copeland said: "Upon its completion, it will position cocoa at the forefront of genomics with the most accumulated genomic information for any crop. The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) has also provided US\$120,000 in funding to the CRC to conduct additional genomic studies to map genes for self-incompatibility, a trait that adversely affects cocoa yield."

After the formalities, students and chocolate connoisseurs sampled milk and dark chocolates, chocolate lollipops, drank cold and hot chocolate beverages and admired the cocoa displays, which were enhanced with sugar apples, round Chinese tamarinds, peewah and other fruit.