

Firm Level Technological Behaviour in the Caribbean:
A Case Study of a Jamaican Soap Manufacturing Plant.

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This study investigated the technological behaviour of Seprod Ltd., during the period 1968-1990, with particular emphasis on the 1980s. It examined how the firm went about acquiring a continuous saponification plant in 1968 and found that it was unable to accumulate a capacity for assimilating that new technology. The purpose was to probe the events and circumstances leading to the partial abandonment of the plant after only six years and a consequent adoption of an inferior soap-boiling process.

The introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies by the Jamaican Government in the early 1980s had acted as a stimulus for the firm's adopting a series of strategies aimed at improving its overall technological performance. The study inquired into the circumstances surrounding a comprehensive refurbishment of Seprod's dilapidated machinery and equipment after the mid-1980s and the creation of several quality-related departments. We established that inadequate technology transfer by

Seprod Ltd., both prior to and during the period of Structural Adjustment had resulted in Seprod being ill-prepared to respond to the changing competitive environment resulting from Structural Adjustment Policies.

The study also explored the reasons for the firm's apparent inability to learn from its previous mistakes that had characterised the saponification plant investment. By contrast, however, the relative success of the firm's efforts to upgrade product quality was largely attributed to the critical role of a pioneering individual in the firm's technological effort.

Finally, the study ends with some recommendations towards the formulation of policies which could provide a few practical guidelines for planning the technological dimension of a firm's strategies.