

# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF INNOVATION

## INNOVATION

**Innovation!!!** It is a word that has been at the forefront of the national developmental agenda for quite some time; one that has been bandied about incessantly. It is also a word that has been, and continues to be, touted as having saving grace for us as a country. While this may in fact be so, it is undeniable that many of us only know the word in its literal context and are unaware of its full embodiment.

If our stated goal of becoming an innovation, knowledge driven economy is to be realized, it is imperative that we accord priority to developing "innovation literacy" as an integral part of developing an enabling innovation ecosystem. What this means is that the full context of innovation, in particular Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) literacy, must become embedded in the national psyche. It is important for us to recognize that whilst the country boasts of having a surfeit of creativity and talent, this does not equate to innovation. It can be deemed an input that is critical to the innovation process, but it does not automatically translate into innovation. Likewise, an invention is not an innovation.

When we speak about Innovation, we refer to the process of implementing or commercializing an invention or technology. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is a grouping of the developed countries, defines Innovation as "all of the scientific, technological, organisational, financial and commercial activities necessary to create, implement, and market new or improved products or processes". Innovation can be classified into a number of major areas, including: product innovation; process innovation; technological innovation; social innovation; and management innovation. At CARIRI, we define it as simply **"Creativity being Implemented"**.

Innovation and invention are therefore distinct terms; an invention being the first occurrence of an idea for a new product or process, while Innovation is the first attempt to carry it out into practice. It therefore only becomes an innovation when it is implemented/commercialized; and therein lies what one can call, particularly in the case of licensing as a commercialization model, the "challenge of translation"; which can be exacerbated by the limitations of the local innovation ecosystem. CARIRI's experience with two prospective innovators amply demonstrates this.

The first involves an inventor of a tool used in the fashion industry who CARIRI assisted for quite some time in

commercialization via licensing. The Inventor spent over five years pursuing commercialization of the invention. With only a primary school education, she was convinced of the value proposition and put in a substantial amount of work to get a proper prototype built, get the product out to potential licensees, and educate herself about key facets of commercialization, including marketing, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and negotiations. She demonstrated laser-like focus, drive and determination in the commercialization pursuit and is now poised to reap the benefits.

The other example involves an inventor of a tool used in the electrical industry who CARIRI has also assisted in commercialization via licensing. The inventor has expended considerable effort in sourcing a licensee, but has been challenged in demonstrating that his invention trumps competing products in the marketplace; in which case the value proposition needs to be revisited.

Both examples are instructive from an innovation perspective in that they demonstrate that it is as much about the person as the product, which would hold true for both licensing and start up; the lesson of believing and persevering where there is a strong value proposition and knowing when to let go and pivot where the value proposition is questionable.

CARIRI has taken up the mantle to lead the charge in the creation of an innovation driven economy and has demonstrated its commitment to the cause via its innovation promotion and capacity building efforts, in particular its flagship development, the Centre for Enterprise Development. Whilst recognizing the magnitude of the task, there being no overnight success, the Institute feels assured that the implementation of the EU-IDB initiative, Shaping the Future of Innovation, would facilitate a quantum leap in the development of the innovation ecosystem which would go a long way in addressing the challenges encountered, in particular low levels of innovation uptake, inadequate funding, and a deficient and uncoordinated innovation ecosystem. As the executing agency for the project, CARIRI eagerly looks forward to enhancing its contribution to advancing the national innovation and economic diversification agenda through this initiative.

To learn more about Shaping the Future of Innovation project visit <https://future.cariri4.com>  
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