

*“Like it or not, we live in interesting times”-
Robert F Kennedy, 1966*



St Helena RESEARCH

ST HELENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE MARKS ITS 2ND ANNIVERSARY

“Like it or not, we live in interesting times”, so said Robert F. Kennedy in a speech in 1966. The expression which seems to have its roots in English diplomatic services and interpretations of a Chinese proverb invokes feelings of opportunity, excitement, anxiety and danger. Whilst our situation today is quite different, I often quote a similar phrase ‘we live in interesting times’ whilst reflecting on how life is changing on St Helena and globally and how these changes affect us. The changes we are experiencing are largely a result of how we (and those before us) have chosen to manage ourselves and our environment as individuals and collectively as a community, locally and globally. Change may be challenging but it also stimulates creativity and innovation to adapt thereby creating new opportunities. We need to understand our role in bringing about change and its impact so that we can better manage ourselves and our environment. Around the world communities are having to find solutions to sustain livelihoods. Responding to climate change is the most pressing example, and there are many others such as tackling communicable diseases like COVID-19 and non-communicable diseases like hypertension and diabetes. If you have followed the COP 26 Conference on climate change in Glasgow recently you will be aware of the many challenges countries face in tackling climate change. One example is the threat of rising sea levels to people living on low lying coastal areas and small island developing states. The participating countries used the scientific evidence as the basis for their decision making so that they could debate each decision being considered and challenge it against the agreed ambition

of keeping global warming below 1.5°C. The final agreement reached at the conference might not be enough to keep global warming below 1.5°C, but at least there was transparency in the decision making process. The scientific research and data collected to date is available for scrutiny, the analysis and conclusions drawn supported and a collective decision taken for which those countries are accountable to their populations for.

On St Helena we have been fortunate to have successfully managed to prevent COVID-19 reaching the general population and in this area too countries around the world, including St Helena, turned to the science and scientific evidence to inform decisions about how best to manage the rapidly developing and changing situation to protect people. These two significant events remind us how important it is to understand change, what is happening, why it is happening (what is the cause), and what the impact will be (how it affects us and our environment). Research helps to increase our knowledge and understanding of a problem or change or a change we might want to bring about, identify solutions and provides evidence to make informed decisions on the course of action or actions. Access to new knowledge from research enables us as individuals, organisations and government to bring about improvements in how we manage ourselves, our environment and leads to improvements in services provided by Government and businesses by channelling resources. And it is with the benefits to society and the support for sustainable development in the forefront of people’s minds, that the Research Institute was launched on St Helena two years ago. The St Helena Research Institute is a collaborative organisation that supports research and opportunities for learning and

promotes, collaborates and conducts research on the Island.

The Research Institute works to:

- **Promote and expand reputable research (across all fields of study) on St Helena that contributes to sustainable development**
- **Protect St Helena's people, heritage and environment**
- **Ensure equitable benefit sharing, maximising benefits to St Helena and the researcher; and**
- **Promote ethical, responsible, high-quality research.**

The Research Institute is an affiliated centre under the Education, Skills & Employment Portfolio's Lifelong Learning Sector. The business of the Institute is guided by the Research Institute Steering Group, made up of representatives from the core partners: St Helena Government – Education, Skills & Employment; Environment, Natural Resources & Planning; Central Support Service; Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development; The Saint Helena National Trust and the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI).

A separate body, the St Helena Research Council, is responsible for authorising and overseeing all research on St Helena. The Research Institute works closely with the Research Council and gives technical advisory support in the processing of research applications and management of research data. All research, whatever the field of study and whether conducted by local or international researchers, is required to have a research licence approved by the Research Council. Portfolio Director Education, Skills & Employment, Wendy Benjamin chairs the Research Council whose members are: Chief Environmental Officer; Isabel Peters, Head Lifelong Learning, Angela Benjamin; Director St Helena National Trust; Senior Management & Social Care Director, Public Health and Social Care, Gavin (Jack) Thomas, ; Head of Sustainable Development, Treasury & Sustainable Development, Damian Burns, and non-voting members Deputy Director, Innovation, South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) Tara Pelembe, and Coordinator, St Helena Research Institute, Rebecca Cairns-Wicks.

Whilst it is somewhat unfortunate that we launched a new institution just before a global pandemic, preventing researchers visiting St Helena, the business of the Research Institute has continued and has been very busy laying the foundations for future growth. Including identifying need and opportunities to support the growth in island research and securing the investment needed to grow.

Notable activities over the last year include: Publication of Research Institute Strategy that sets out the direction and what we want to achieve over the next three years.

Our Vision is to be an internationally recognised centre for the advancement of new knowledge and innovation on and for St Helena. Which we will achieve

by creating and promoting opportunities for research, innovation and the advancement of learning, ensuring that research and new knowledge is accessible and used for the benefit of St Helena. Three successful bids to external funders: EU BEST 2.0+; Google and Darwin Plus (in partnership with CABI and ENRP) that will result in new digital research resources, new research on the pathogens affecting our food crops and endemic plants and create three new project jobs. Processing eight applications for research. Covering the natural sciences (marine and terrestrial), Social Science and Medicine and Health Science. In 2020, 11 applications were received and it is expected the total number for 2021 will be similar. New relationships establishing and enabling collaboration and work in new areas of research. Including securing a PhD student to investigate the tree diseases of the cloud forest trees and fibre optic cable related research. Collaboration on the development of the Peaks Implementation Plan. Funding under the Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office', Conflict, Stability & Security Fund enables the Research Institute to support and develop the research programme for the Peaks and contributes to staff salaries. The interests of the community are at the heart of the Research Institute's work and creating opportunities to share the benefits of research and providing access to the information and knowledge gained through research is a key core function. Funding secured through the EU BEST 2.0+ for establishing a St Helena biological recording system and Google to set up a digital research library are two valuable ways that we can make it easier for people to access and engage in research in the coming years and we look forward to sharing news on these projects as they develop and progress.

To mark the occasion of the St Helena Research Institute's 2nd Anniversary we have invited those researchers who are conducting research on the Island under licence to submit either a short article or make a presentation describing their research, the progress made and what has been learnt. The articles will be published in the papers over the coming weeks and the presentations are now being shown on the local TV channel with thanks to the support of SURE SA Ltd. We are sincerely grateful to all the researchers who have contributed and hope that you will enjoy finding out more about some of the amazing studies and work being conducted on the Island, in the coming weeks.

For further information contact :
rebecca.cairnswicks@sainthelena.gov.sh
or tel 22607 ext 223.

