



## **Executive Director's Message for CARDI Day 2020**

**Barton A. Clarke**

CARDI Day 2020 like most other celebrations this year, will be quiet and understated. The COVID -19 pandemic has not only wreaked havoc on Caribbean economies but has thrust the Region's vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity in the spotlight. In this regard it is refreshing to hear the pronouncement by the CARICOM Heads of Government (CHOG) of their commitment to reduce Caribbean food imports by 25 % by 2025.

I will not reiterate the many challenges facing the sector, as these have been well articulated and publicized. What I will do, is share CARDI's vision for the development of a dynamic, productive, sustainable and climate resilient agriculture sector – as we set about to build back better. We believe once properly resourced, the Region's food and nutrition security goals will be achieved and agriculture will re-emerge as a key driver for social and economic prosperity and significantly contribute in addressing the scourge of chronic non-communicable diseases.

Caribbean agriculture holds tremendous potential and on the occasion of our 46<sup>th</sup> Anniversary I wish to reaffirm our commitment to the regional community on changing the trajectory of regional agriculture. CARDI will continue to leverage the breadth of its expertise and extensive partnerships to build a climate smart, dynamic, sustainable and productive agriculture sector.

However, a new way of thinking and practice is needed - a business as usual approach, will simply, not work. Today, many of the systems, practices and technologies in use, are antiquated, inefficient, counterproductive and unsustainable. Bold, disruptive, future facing, innovative strategies are needed to improve the productivity and resilience of the Caribbean's agri-food systems. The right innovations and investments will position the Caribbean's agriculture sector to be an engine for food and nutrition security, sustainable growth, employment and resilience.

So, as we look towards the future, CARDI in 2021 will continue to spotlight, introduce and validate innovative practices, new tools and emerging technologies which can transform agriculture into an important economic pillar for the region.

We won't be starting from ground zero though. I am happy to share that we at CARDI have already started working in some of these areas - biofortification, renewable energy, climate resilience, agrobiodiversity conservation and big data. The plan is to scale up our efforts in these areas. Simultaneously, we'll continue working on raising the profile and improving the visibility of Caribbean agriculture. We also recognize the importance of involving and engaging with youths. They are crucial to driving change in the sector and we'll



continue to provide mentorship, leadership and opportunities for young people. Another important area of focus for the Institute will be digitalizing agriculture. Integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) in agriculture will be a real game changer for all stakeholders along the value chain.

2020 has been a challenging year. I wish to thank the Board of Governors and Board of Directors for their steadfast support.

To all staff – the people who work every day to build a better institute, thank you for your commitment and selfless service.

In closing I wish to reaffirm CARDI's commitment to improving lives through agricultural research.

