



PROGRAMA FINANCIADO  
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# National Drug Observatories (National Drug Information Networks) and Academia

## Partnerships and Possibilities

## Reflections from the Caribbean

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# Evolution of National Drug Observatories

- National Drug Information Networks (NDINs) were established through a European Union funded programme in 2001
- DINs were set up in the English, Dutch and French speaking Caribbean countries
- The aim was to :: To guide and strengthen substance use surveillance and response systems of the Caribbean.”
- The main focus were on epidemiological surveillance for drug demand reduction
- With the involvement of CICAD, National Drug Observatories were introduced that broaden the focus to demand and supply surveillance



# Challenges faced by NDOs in advancing research

- Weak cultural attitude towards research activities
- Lack of human capacity and competencies to realize research activities at the NDO level
- Because of the financial cost of research activities, most if not all had to be done with funding from donor agencies
- Donor agencies, therefore, were the ones that set the research agenda for the NDOs
- Little or no coordination and partnership with academia

# How did the NDOs achieve their research agenda?

- Mainly from going it alone – whatever resources were available for data collection and analysis were utilized
- In many cases the analysis was done by a consultant contracted by a funding agency
- Results were mainly used within the context of prevention education at the community or school level
- Overtime, academia started to become involved through encouragement and then structured partnerships
- National research agenda helped to inform some of the collaborations



# What did this partnership look like – Inclusion of Academia

- **Basic**
  - Countries that had opportunities to make connections and establish partnerships requested help from academia (informal)
- **Formalized Arrangements**
  - Protocols and agreements for sharing databases (data banking) with academia
  - Acknowledgement for the NDO if data was published
  - Use of data by students to conduct secondary data analysis
  - Using media as a tool for dissemination of results



# What are the possibilities for partnerships

- Graduate students can develop key research agenda (that can shape public policies) in partnership with the NDOs
- Academia on the other hand can help shape the research agenda for activities within the NDOs
- Together the output of these research activities can help define public health policy implications
- This can provide a stepping stone for the inclusion of the non-governmental organization into research activities





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Based on new information – the possibilities to expand research with academia can see overall benefits in the field of

Epidemiological studies

Evaluation of drug policies (prevention and treatment)

Consumption patterns

Prosecution and incarceration (monitoring, impact and evaluation)

Chemical characterization of drugs (NSP and others)

Toxicological Data

Neurobiology

Anthropological and cultural approaches

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## Conclusion

- The role of research in an academic institution is critical for its long-term viability and development, and knowledge-driven growth based on innovation is essential. To this end a partnership with the NDO research activities serves a complimentary function
- Partnership allows the NDOs to serve as a specialised technical resource, particularly in the field of substance use/abuse and their surveillance (epidemiological, law enforcement, interdiction, etc)
- Involvement of academia helps to boost research skills within the NDOs and increases the ability to search for, locate, extract, organise, evaluate and use or present information that is relevant to a particular topic.

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