



# STUDENTS SHINE IN INNOVATION AND VOLUNTEERISM AT NIHERST'S COMDESI AWARDS



Improved research skills, along with innovative, critical and civic-minded thinking, were developed in students from four secondary schools who participated in NIHERST's 2015 Community-Centred Design and Innovation (COMDESI) programme.

This year, 22 students from forms two-four solved a challenge faced within their respective schools. Participants surveyed their peers, and then developed, prototyped and tested solutions. These included cooling classrooms which did not have air-conditioning units and managing excess runoff from insufficient drainage which contributed to flooding in some classrooms.

Now in its sixth 9-month cycle, COMDESI was launched collaboratively with the HEROES Foundation and has graduated 209 keen and creative young people from schools across the country. In this cycle, students from Bishop Anstey High School East, North Gate College, Parvati Girls' Hindu College and Woodbrook Government Secondary School were trained in community engagement, communication and teamwork skills; the innovation process; research skills; problem-solving; 'technopreneurship'; and interview techniques. During the Easter vacation period teams delved into topics such as reverse engineering and entrepreneurship, and were introduced to the basics of computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided

manufacturing (CAM) using AutoCAD software, 3D printing and other resources of NIHERST's Fab Lab.

Through close mentoring, continuous assessment and incentives, which encouraged deep engagement with fellow students, NIHERST facilitated an especially high level of dedication and engagement among participants. This was commended by judges as it resulted in meaningful, high-calibre solutions that were customised and relevant for their school communities. North Gate College, for instance, was awarded the Special Prize for Community Engagement.

Taking on the true spirit of a scientist, students developed greater confidence and skills as they witnessed the impact of their solutions. The support of parents, teachers and schoolmates was also pivotal. For example, students from the winning school, Parvati Girls' Hindu College, travelled for many months from Debe to the National Science Centre in D'Abadie, in order to participate.



COMDESI participants pose proudly with coordinators as they close the latest edition of the programme (from left): Joycelyn Lee Young, Ag. President of NIHERST; members of the NIHERST Innovation Department; students from the four teams; Phillip Julien, Chairman of the Heroes Foundation; and Patricia Auguste, Youth Programme Coordinator of the Heroes Foundation.