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CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM:  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PLANNING SECTOR

Background and Operational  
Structure



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

To launch the development of the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning, the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) requested support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada.

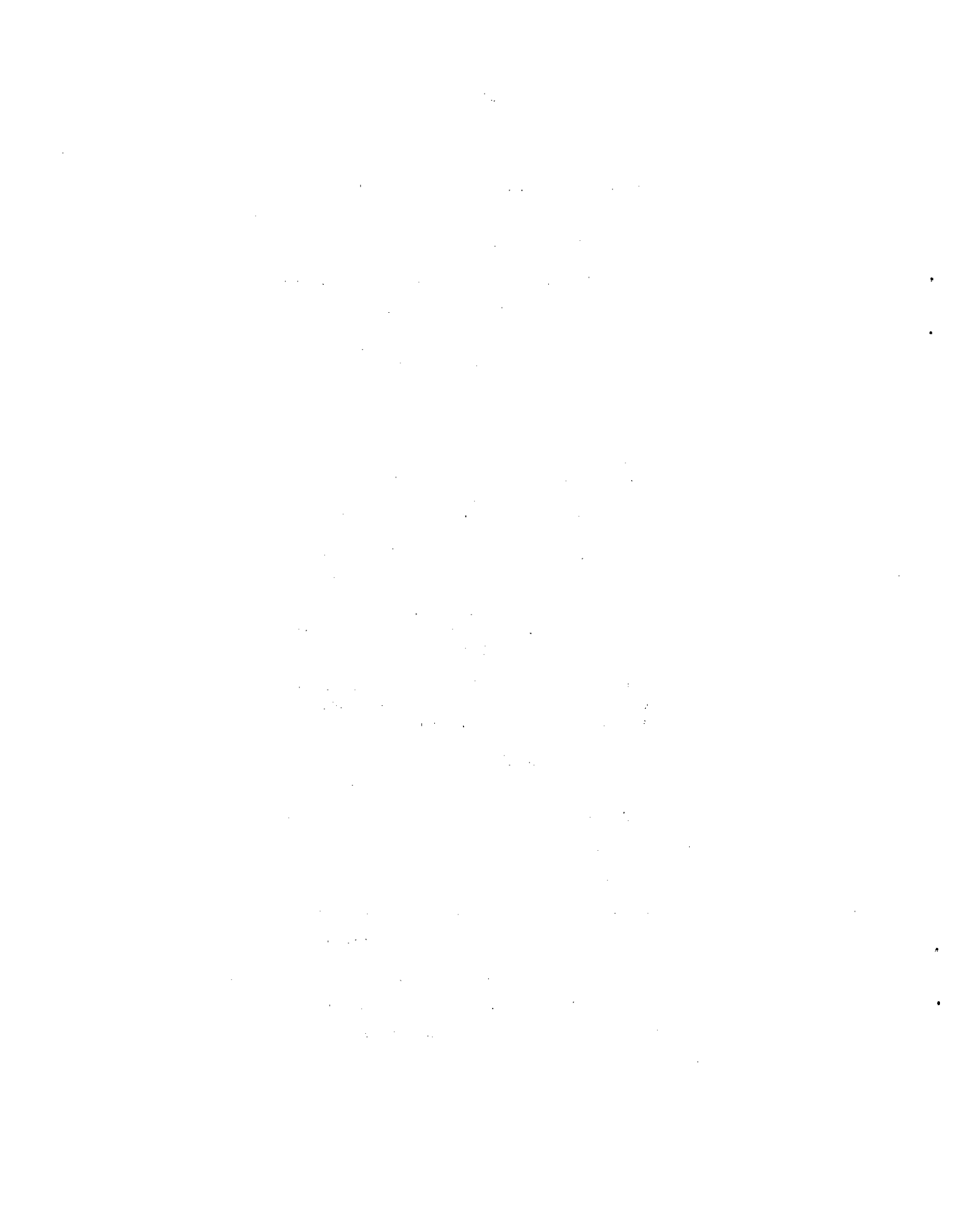
This request was granted for a period of one year beginning May 1979, to initiate the following activities:

- i. Strengthen national information centres in the field of economic and social planning;
- ii. Secure compatibility among the various national centres;
- iii. Establish mechanisms for the flow of information among national centres and between national centres and the Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC);
- iv. Promote the use of information by the economic and social planning community;
- v. Prepare a bibliography of documents produced by the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC); and
- vi. Prepare a second bibliography of documents produced both by CDCC and by national institutions in Caribbean Countries.

Funds have been made available by IDRC, to finance the appointment for one year, of a Documentalist/Trainer and a Documentalist/Indexer, respectively; for the organization of training courses, and travel.

CEPAL Office for the Caribbean will have direct responsibility for the implementation of the project, with active participation by the National Planning Agencies of Member Countries of the CDCC.

The present document provides information on the background and the operational structure of the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning, which has entered in its initial stage of development.



1.

BACKGROUND AND BASIC INFORMATION

At the first meeting of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee<sup>1/</sup> held in Havana in 1975, it was felt that the absence of effective dissemination of knowledge and information relating to the sub-region and the under-utilization of available expertise in the Caribbean have been a hindrance to effective co-operation efforts. Consequently, the Committee mandated the ECLA Office for the Caribbean (Secretariat of the CDCC) to expedite the process of mutual exchange, eliminate deficiencies in communication, data gathering and distribution and establish a system for collecting and exchange of information covering the sub-region<sup>2/</sup>.

The Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC) was created in 1977 as an instrument to support regional co-operation activities. The following are its objectives:

General

- To support the development and co-operation activities of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee; and
- To promote and facilitate optimum utilization of the information resources available within and outside the sub-region.

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<sup>1/</sup> The CDCC is a permanent subsidiary body of the Economic Commission for Latin America and was established in accordance with Resolution 358 (XVI Session of CEPAL, held in Port of Spain, May 1975) to act as a co-ordinating body for activities relating to development and co-operation in CDCC member countries which include Bahamas, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize and the West Indies Associated States. Netherlands Antilles is observer.

<sup>2/</sup> Report of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee, Cuba, 31 October - 4 November 1975. (E/CEPAL/1010, p. 41).

Specific

- To provide national planners and policy-makers, research centres specializing in Caribbean problems and international organizations assisting in Caribbean development activities with pertinent, accurate, and up-dated information relating to priority sectors on which regional co-operation actions are to be centred; and
- To assume the responsibility of an inter-governmental co-ordinating body in order to secure a balanced and integrated development of national information systems in the sub-region, and facilitate the flow of information among the Caribbean countries, and between them and regional as well as international systems.

The Third Session of the CDCC endorsed the recommendations of a technical level meeting<sup>3/</sup> concerning the development of information services within the sub-region and mandated the Secretariat to accelerate the establishment of a Caribbean Information System based on effective links of co-operation among library and information units covering sectors relevant to regional and national priorities<sup>4/</sup>. The system was seen as a positive means of strengthening intra-Caribbean technical co-operation.

One of the sectors identified by the CDCC as a priority for promoting the development and integration process in the Caribbean is economic and social planning. In order to provide decision-makers, planners and project implementers with effective information services, the Secretariat proposes to

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<sup>3/</sup> Report on Meeting of Librarians and Documentalists, 29 November - 2 December 1977, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

<sup>4/</sup> Report of the Third Session of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee, Belize City, Belize, 12 - 18 April, 1978. (E/CEPAL/CDCC/44. Rev. 3).

establish a decentralized Caribbean Information System linking economic and social planning agencies. Co-ordination at the national level will be through a National Co-ordinating Office and at the regional level through the Caribbean Documentation Centre, which was created for this purpose.

The System will strengthen information infrastructure at the national level and ensure compatibility among socio-economic information units thereby contributing to the improvement of the total effectiveness of the planning process in the Caribbean by enabling planners to draw on the experiences of other countries.

2.

THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM  
FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PLANNING

2.1 Rationale

- i. In the past, the majority of Caribbean Governments gave priority to the development of information services for the academic-oriented population and for the general public. These services have not been able to meet adequately the needs of planners, policy-makers and development project implementers. Specialized services for this group of users have therefore begun to develop even though somewhat unevenly. It is felt, therefore, that priority should be given to strengthening and co-ordinating these services since the thrust of development in the sub-region will depend to a large degree on how the information needs of planners and policy-makers are met; and
- ii. Efforts by existing libraries in the sub-region to secure bibliographic control of government documents and technical assistance reports have produced limited results, primarily because of the original confidential nature of the information, inadequate mechanisms to ensure declassification, and the absence in most countries, of functionally organized records and archives management services.

## 2.2 Objectives

The aims of the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning are:

### General

To support social and economic planning, research and development at national and sub-regional levels by making timely and relevant information available in each country according to existing and potential user needs.

### Specific

- i. To co-ordinate and develop at national and sub-regional levels the services offered by the libraries, archives and other documentation units specializing in economic and social planning information, in order to make a much wider range of resources available to anyone of the information components of the system;
- ii. To apply modern records and archives management principles and techniques for the handling of governmental documents and other unpublished materials;
- iii. To facilitate access to the economic and social planning literature available in the sub-region, through the establishment of indexes, abstracts, union lists of serials, etc.;
- iv. To expedite information flow within and outside the sub-region, through the application of modern storage and communication process;
- v. To reduce unnecessary duplication and to improve the quality of the total resources existing in the system through resource and cost-sharing agreements; and
- vi. To promote the adequate use of the information available in the sub-region.

## 2.3 Type of Users

The principal users of this system at the national and regional levels will be the planners; policy-makers; communicators, managers, researchers, teachers and students concerned with the study of the



subjects here presented. The majority of these users will come from the same organizations and institutions which produce the documents.

These organizations and institutions are:

At the National Level

Ministries of Finance, Planning and Development;

National Statistical Offices;

Central Banks;

Sectoral planning offices which feed the Central Planning Agency; and

Universities and other research centres.

At the Regional Level

Regional planning and integration agencies and bodies: (CARICOM, CDB, CDCC, ECCM, WISA);

Research Institutes specializing in Caribbean problems; and

International Agencies operating in CDCC countries.

User studies will be conducted jointly by the different planning information units existing in each country, under the guidance of a National Co-ordinating Office for Economic and Social Planning Information and in collaboration with relevant national planning offices. Studies undertaken to this effect by the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CEPAL/CLADES) in Santiago, Chile, will be taken into consideration.

Based on the results of the user studies, the CDC, in co-operation with National Co-ordinating Offices will establish and maintain a classification scheme of users' needs.

## 2.4 Scope

It will be the responsibility of the Caribbean Documentation Centre, in co-operation with the National Co-ordinating Offices to define the scope of the system, taking into consideration:

- Fields of knowledge to be covered;
- Geographical coverage;
- Period coverage;
- Language coverage; and
- Type of Documents.

In defining the scope of the System, the CDC takes into account the criteria developed in this context by CLADES

### Fields of Knowledge

The fields of knowledge to be covered by the information system will be determined according to priority users' information needs as well as the national development plans and the broad categories established by the CBCC work programme.

The information input provided by the institutions which generate records and other documents in the field of economic and social planning, will be a decisive factor in determining the subject scope of the system.

### Geographical Coverage

The system will include initially documents on economic and social planning and development produced in this sub-region and documents published outside the sub-region but related to planning and development in the Caribbean.

At a later stage of development, the System will also cover all planning and development information existing in the sub-region, regardless of its place of origin.

### Period Coverage

Initially, the System will cover documents produced as from 1979 working backwards to 1970. Later on it will include not only current but also significant retrospective documents from earlier years.

### Language Coverage

Initially, the System will enter documents collected in English, Spanish, French and Dutch. The working languages will be English and Spanish, in the first stage; French and Dutch will be included at a later stage. Original language titles will be retained.

### Type of Documents

The system will include all published and unpublished materials, giving special attention to non-conventional documents and reports, emanating from national planning offices; research findings and documentation related to development projects, in progress and completed.

### 2.5 Structure and Functions

The basic structure of the system will be formed by the information units on economic and social planning already in existence in the sub-region, co-ordinated in each country by a competent National Co-ordinating Office and at the sub-regional level by the Caribbean Documentation Centre which will act as the Sub-Regional co-ordinating and support body.

The system will adopt a flexible framework to permit maximum capability for direct contact between its different components. Information input to the System and services to users will be decentralized, whereas the overall planning and development of the System will be under the responsibility of the CDC, in co-ordination with the corresponding National Offices. The role of the CDC and the National Co-ordinating Offices is basically to strengthen existing library/documentation units, to advise on the creation of information units where necessary, and to co-ordinate, support and promote those activities which are common to all library/documentation units in a given sector, country or in the

sub-region, such as: training and education of information personnel, inter-library lending, union lists, standardization of techniques and procedures. On the other hand, the decentralization of information input and services will allow a better exploitation of the planning and development documentation in each country and will permit more adequate services to users. This framework of "co-ordinated decentralized" structure will require a high degree of participation and co-operation from the system components.

The co-ordinating bodies will have among others, the following principal functions:

a) CDC, acting as Regional Office

- i. Promote active participation of all CDCC Member countries in the Caribbean Information System;
- ii. In liaison with CLADES and in consultation with information specialists and representatives from Planning Offices in the CDCC Member States, plan and develop the system to operate initially on a manual basis but designed for the eventual transfer to an automated system.  
  
During the initial phase of operation of the System, the CDC will use the computer facilities at CEPAL/CLADES to create the Caribbean Planning Data Base (CARISPLAN).
- iii. Encourage in each country of the sub-region a formal agreement of co-operation between the Ministry of Planning and Development, and other relevant government offices and research institutions to integrate their respective libraries and documentation units into a national network of economic and social planning information. The agreement shall designate one institution as the National Co-ordinating Office with an indication of its functions; it also shall ensure that each participating information unit will maintain its own identity and responsibility to its users;

- iv. Work within the CLADES methodology and the ISIS system in order to standardize bibliographic procedures according to internationally accepted norms. The CDC will provide training courses and advisory services to the national planning institutions in the installation and operation of the information system;
- v. Provide the country input to the Caribbean Planning Data Base from those CDCC member states which are not yet equipped to assume this responsibility;
- vi. Produce the Caribbean Bibliography on Economic and Social Planning, using the Caribbean Planning Data Base, and disseminate within the sub-region abstracts of research findings, prepared and submitted by national Co-ordinating Offices;
- vii. Compile bibliographies on topics of special concern to the sub-region, using the Caribbean Planning Data Base;
- viii. Function as a central clearing house by developing a depository collection of primary documents which are difficult to obtain and providing photocopy services. At a later stage in the development of the System, the CDC will establish a bank of microfiches of these documents;
- ix. Establish and maintain a register of research completed and research in progress, in and about the Caribbean, based on the data provided by the National Co-ordinating Offices and obtained from external sources;
- x. Establish and maintain a directory of research personnel and research institutions (public and private sectors) in the Caribbean, based on

the data provided by the National Co-ordinating Offices and obtained from regional and international agencies;

- xi. Co-ordinate at the regional level referral of enquiries, inter-library loan procedures and other resource-sharing activities.
- xii. Provide reinforcement services to participating library/documentation units, (e.g. data base searches and SDI services) once the ISIS system is installed in Port of Spain; and
- xiii. In co-ordination with the Department of Library Studies, UWI and other relevant training institutions in the Caribbean, assess manpower development and user training needs in the field of economic and social planning information and plan, organize and conduct the necessary training activities, such as courses, seminars, in-service training, etc.

b) National Co-ordinating Offices

- i. Act as the national link to the system;
- ii. Co-ordinate and assist in the organization of the different planning and development information units existing in the country;
- iii. Devise a system for declassification of documents based on institutional policy;
- iv. Develop adequate mechanisms for the flow of information at the national level;
- v. Promote the use of standardized bibliographic procedures;
- vi. Develop a depository collection of all documents produced at the national level which fall within the scope of the system, and function as a central clearinghouse;

- vii. Provide the input of national current and retrospective planning and development documentation to the Caribbean Documentation Centre for input to the Caribbean data base. The standardized bibliographic Worksheet of the Economic Commission for Latin America, Office for the Caribbean will be used for this purpose; subject content of the material will be identified according to agreed-upon parameters (using the ISIS system, the OECD macrothesaurus and other relevant thesauri);
- viii. Compile the national bibliography on economic and social planning information, union lists of serials and specialized bibliographies in the field of planning and related areas;
- ix. Promote and co-ordinate inter-library loans, co-operative acquisition and other resource-sharing activities at the national level, aimed at strengthening the service capacity of the individual library/documentation units;
- x. Prepare and maintain an up-to-date register of economic and social planning and development research projects completed and research in progress at the national level and submit a copy of the register to the CDC;
- xi. Prepare and maintain an up-to-date directory of research personnel and institutions, and submit a copy to the CDC;
- xii. Abstract and disseminate research findings to relevant users;
- xiii. Provide information referral services at the national level;

- xiv. With the assistance of the CDC organize and conduct seminars, workshops, courses and other activities aimed at training specialized information personnel and information users; and
- xv. Promote governmental and public support.

c) Regional Development and Integration Organizations  
(CARICOM, CDB, ECCM, OECS, others)

- i. Provide the input of the documents produced by their respective institutions into the Caribbean data base;
- ii. Collaborate in providing assistance to the lesser developed countries of the Caribbean in the organization of their information services;
- iii. Collaborate in the planning, organization and conduct of training programmes; and
- iv. Participate in resource and cost-sharing activities, based on institutional agreements.

2.6 Services

The System will provide the following basic services:

- i. Access to current and retrospective economic and social planning and development information produced in the sub-region or about it; and
- ii. Access to world economic and social planning and development information available in the different components of the system and outside the sub-region through links with regional and international systems.

These basic services will be facilitated through the following activities:



Initially

- i. Publication of bibliographic tools such as:
  - Index to documents produced by the CDCC Secretariat, Economic Commission for Latin America, Office for the Caribbean.
  - Caribbean Bibliography on Economic and Social Planning and Development.
  - Caribbean Union Catalogue of planning and development publications (initial phase: serial publications).
  - Bibliographies and abstracts on special topics;
- ii. Information searches on request;
- iii. Question/answer services;
- iv. Referral services;
- v. Inter-library loan;
- vi. Register of research completed and research in progress;
- vii. Directory of research personnel and institutions.

At a later stage

- viii. Creation of sub-regional computerized data banks;
- ix. Current awareness service;
- x. Selective dissemination of information;
- xi. Document reproduction and procurement services;
- xii. Telecommunication services; and
- xiii. User training.

The printed products of the system will be provided free of charge to the National Co-ordinating Offices.

## 2.7 Methodology

The system will be developed on the basis of voluntary participation.

The Economic Commission for Latin America will encourage the planning authorities of the Caribbean region to establish contractual agreements for co-operation between the different components of the system, calling for commitments from each participant to the system as a whole.

Agreements will be established with CEPAL/CLADES for technical assistance in the installation of the ISIS system at the Regional Co-ordinating Office (CDC), and in the initial provision of a training workshop for personnel in the information units of national planning agencies and regional integration bodies.

The CLADES/CDC Manual for Use of the Bibliographic Worksheet will be a guide to individual information units in the organization of their respective collections according to common standards and procedures, and in the preparation of Worksheets for input to the Caribbean data base according to a common format. To permit maximum participation by each component of the system, techniques and methods will be used which are compatible to both manual and automated operations for the control, analysis, storage and dissemination of information.

A Documentalist/Training Officer from the CDC will organize continuing training courses in the sub-region and assist in the organization and co-ordination of the information services on economic and social planning, particularly in the lesser developed countries, in order to achieve immediate improvement of service to users.

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