ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Subregional Heaquarters for the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION COMMITTEE

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN DIGITAL LIBRARY

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Introduction and Summary of Findings

This assessment was completed at the request of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as an input to the Workshop on "The Caribbean Digital Library: A Cooperative Approach to Digital Content and Management," to be conducted and held during the ACURIL Conference (Trinidad, May 23-29,2004), by Ms. Sandra John, Chief, Caribbean Documentation Centre, (CDC). The assessment is intended to provide some indication of the use of the CDL, its technical and management structure and to provide some recommendations for increasing participation.

The assessment focused on staff of the Documentation Centre, users within the ECLAC system, information specialists in the region, and in particular the 'experts' who participated in the original planning meeting, as well as external users.

The process involved meetings with some ECLAC personnel, telephone interviews with a number of persons around the region, email discussions with others, and an intensive perusal of the CDL online. Considerable time was also spent looking at other Caribbean websites and similar models of information resources.

In brief, the assessment indicates that the CDL is a useful resource and is being used by a small and specialist group. User response to the CDL has been helpful in making some technical adjustments along the way, and this assessment has pinpointed others to be addressed.

The management structure of a voluntary cooperative Consortium has been, as expected, less successful than was hoped. Members of the Consortium, however, were extremely keen to find the correct mechanism to ensure the growth of the CDL, and guaranteed their commitment.

Users were high in their praise for the CDL and were keen to see an expanded information resource which would provide access to areas not now included, e.g., 'grey literature' and full text journals.

The rapid pace of technology growth and the possibilities offered were considered to be seen as a new environment in which some flexibility with rules could be permitted. The CDL was mandated to be risk taking in order to meet users' needs and to respond creatively to the changing technology.

This approach was particularly relevant in respect of the difficulties relating to copyright of electronic resources, and the growing tendency of providing links to other relevant resources, without the full knowledge of the source organization/person. Other models on the Internet indicated that this is now a standard approach and that appropriate disclaimers are placed to provide some measure of copyright protection.

The promotion and marketing of the CDL generated most discussion, both by users and non-users. Users envisaged extensive growth if the CDL is promoted to the body of Caribbean researchers through their input of links, and felt that promotion should be a major focus. Non-users were interested in learning of its availability. Both groups suggested regular marketing to keep users aware of developments.

In conducting the study, users and respondents were provided with a background note on the key issues to be addressed by respondents, attached here as Annex 1. These key issues were drawn from the original document which established the CDL. [1]

The report on the main findings is arranged under the key issues noted for discussion, though in many instances some issues overlap and it was difficult to keep them separate.

Report on Findings

The report follows the structure of Annex 1 and the key issues posed there which respondents were asked to address.

Concept and Objectives

Staff are committed to the concept and objectives of the CDL and are in agreement with the design. They recognize that it is a progression from the CARISPLAN system and stressed the need to maintain a link with the original concept of the CARIPLAN network.

It is in this context that the recommendation for a project which focuses on an area which CARISPLAN addressed and which the CDL many not be addressing, i.e., the grey literature generated in the region was made.

It was suggested that the CDL should be expanded to include 'grey literature.' It is assumed that much of the grey literature of an earlier period (typeset or stenciled) is now being generated electronically, given the increase in computers in organizations. However, while electronic material exists and has replaced typewritten reports, many organizations still do not have the resources (websites) for loading their documents and reports.

It was suggested that re-establishing links with the CARISPLAN national focal points could lead to agreements for obtaining a significant amount of this material. This suggestion requires a policy decision on the loading of electronic documents which are not on a web site, and which may require ECLAC to act as host for some of the documents. This enlarges the design of the CDL beyond its current concept to include not only links to web-based resources but also as a host for electronic documents from other agencies.

It should be noted that this was a recommendation from staff of the Caribbean Documentation Centre and may reflect their awareness of user needs.

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[1] ECLAC/CDCC. Report of Meeting of experts to discuss the establishment of a Caribbean Digital Library on the Web. POS, ECLAC, 2000

Management Structure

The Steering Committee concept has not been as successful as was hoped. There was some initial input to the CDL by the experts who participated in the first meeting but this has not been regularly maintained. Only a minority of the original expert group have added links to the CDL on their organization's website. (CDB, CAREC, OECS, CARICOM). In effect, the operation remains an ECLAC initiative, with little managerial or technical input by the original Consortium. (See Slide 7 of Power Point Presentation attached).

Respondents were strong in their view that the Steering Committee should be an active one, that the Committee should address the administrative and operational issues, and that some effort should be made to establish the Steering Committee as a an Advisory Task Force for what could be a larger project, managed by ECLAC.

ECLAC was commended for developing the initiative but an expansion of the CDL will be necessary if the CDL is expected to maintain coverage of the growth in Caribbean web resources, and undertake the new features suggested by users/respondents.

A suggested model seen on the Internet is the Social Sciences Information Gateway (SOSIG) (www.sosig.ac.uk), which suggests a way forward. A service of the Resource Discovery Network (RDN), (www.rdn.ac.uk), the *'Social Sciences Information Gateway is a freely available Internet service which aims to provide a trusted source of selected, high quality Internet information for students, academics, researchers and practitioners in the social sciences, business and law'.*

The RDN is a collaboration of over 70 educational and research organizations, including the Natural History Museum and the British Library. In contrast to search engines, the RDN gathers resources which are carefully selected, indexed and described by specialists in partner institutions. The concept is similar to the ECLAC CDL; the resources however are significantly different. In addition, the network is funded.

In order to move towards the SOSIG model, there must be a regional commitment to the further development of the CDL from the heads of organizations and not agreements between the information personnel of the institutions involved. This will assist in the provision of human and financial resources and the establishment of the Task Force for the determination of policies and guidelines. SOSIG allows users to add links, but does provide a very detailed Scope Policy document (online) which guides the selection of sites. It is also suggested that the SOSIG management structure, the guidelines and operations can be a useful model for the development of the CDL. (See the Scope Policy of the SOSIG at www.sosig.ac.uk/desire/escope.html)

The structure of the networks managed under the RDN is based on 'hubs,' which have responsibility for core subject areas. This feature is also recommended as a possible approach for CDL.

Content and Coverage

There was agreement on the subject fields selected, as these are in keeping with the ECLAC work programme. The expansion (from 17 to 27 subject areas) was made at the request of users, confirming usage. (See Slides 9 & 10 of Power Point Presentation attached).

One respondent, while recognizing that the CDL was very useful, made a suggestion that **key documents** in each category should be made available, citing as an example medium-term economic policy documents and strategies under Economic Policy. It was also suggested that the sub-headings should be increased, and that a group/country category would be a useful addition to the major subject headings.

The original concept was that links would be made to **documents.** This has evolved to a broader approach based on user demand and now includes links to guides and resources. Staff members of the Documentation Centre have expressed strong support for this expanded focus. There is, for example, a clear indication of this feature in the links provided to the government, regional and international agencies sites.

There are however links to other sites which are essentially directories but which are not so clearly marked.

It was suggested that some restructuring of the site is needed to indicate clearly the distinction between links to documents and to guides or directory type websites.

One respondent noted the increasing availability of full text journals (non-Caribbean) on the web by various methods (e-subscription, free, delayed) and by contrast the difficulty of access to either indexes or the full text of Caribbean journals.

A case was made for the inclusion of full text of Caribbean journals in the subject areas covered by CDL, with the development of a project which would address negotiations for both e-subscriptions and free materials.

Technical Backbone

The CDL is a web-enabled database and has a search engine. Log reports on its use are generated. The System Manager is confident that the technology is suitable and works well. He expressed the view that the difficulties experienced with the system are in respect of staff availability and other ongoing work programmes. Further development and enhancement based on the available technology will require additional human resource commitments.

Users, both in-house and external, have experienced down time, and see this as a deterrent to continued use. Several users suggested that the selection of one subject heading per item was not satisfactory.

It is suggested that the capability of the technology to extend user access to information should be explored fully. While the CDC manages and provides users with two significant information resources, the Bibliographic Database and the CDL, they are not offered as a

package. Access to both the CDL and the bibliographic database will offer the user an expanded view on his information request. A seamless linkage which gives the user access to both resources, i.e., the Bibliographic Database and the CDL, (with a clear statement of what is full text and what not) when a search is conducted may be an improvement. In addition, a clear statement to the user of the difference in result, between selecting a major subject heading and searching by using index terms, should be included on the main page.

Two external users who have had difficulty accessing the site suggested that mirroring the site at other locations might assist in resolving that problem.

Users also proposed that e-mail discussion lists and occasional e-conferences could be introduced to permit participating agencies to discuss problems, and participate in development.

Geographical Spread

The emphasis on the Caribbean countries of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) was seen as very important. One user commented that in the overall web presence of ECLAC, the 'C' previously appeared as a lower case 'c,' and the CDL has been the first step in addressing the balance.

Integrity of Links

This issue generated considerable discussion. The original concept of input (by staff and Committee members) followed by verification was soon abandoned as the reality of limited staff time for this process became clear. While there is still some attempt at a structured process of site verification, not all sites are checked. In addition, the possibility of immediate upload by external users is also a concern. The view that inappropriate sites could be loaded and available without ECLAC authorization was seen as a threat to the CDL. The verification process involves checks on both content and the URL.

The overriding view expressed was for the verification of links by ECLAC on an ongoing basis. It was felt that this would give some credibility to the CDL and would not result in users losing confidence in the CDL.

The issue of integrity of links is closely associated with several others, including the original design which required input from a Consortium (and the verification of the links added by the inputting members of the Consortium), and the openness of the system which allows users to add links they consider relevant and appropriate. The matter of copyright of materials is also related, but is addressed separately.

The ability of ECLAC to verify and maintain verification on an ongoing basis is constrained by its human resource base. In this context, the Consortium approach (the original concept which required the approval of the parent organization for loading of documents) appears to be an ideal solution. However, voluntary participation has not been effective and clearly a more structured approach is needed. The integrity of links is closely allied with the management structure and it is again suggested that a regional agreement for the development of the CDL be sought, with responsibilities assigned to participating institutions for core subjects.

It was pointed out by one respondent, however, that in the current electronic scenario many studies are individual works (websites) which are not necessarily credited to any organization, and verification by a parent organization is therefore not possible. Some process therefore of verification and acceptance by ECLAC seems to be needed for such materials.

The other side of this coin is that the profile of the organization (ECLAC), could be a deterrent to users who may not be confident of the level of their work, and may therefore be unwilling to add their sites to the CDL. In this instance the verification and acceptance by ECLAC would need to be preceded by promotional efforts that encouraged input from consultants and specialists working on their own.

Input of Links by External Users

The current process for building the CDL is essentially done by the staff of the Documentation Centre, and one short-term intern. The staff members' responsibilities include the maintenance of the Documentation Centre and its several databases, the provision of services, the management of the operations of the Documentation Centre and many other related responsibilities.

The routine processes for the verification of the links added and the check on headings and index terms selected are additional duties which are performed *'as time permits.'* The ongoing searching for identification of new links is done by the short-term intern.

In respect of the openness of the system allowing the addition of links by users, there were different views. Some respondents expressed concern about the current method of immediate upload, particularly when it was revealed that the verification of these added links is not possible on a systematic basis.

It should be noted that there is little indication that users have accepted the invitation to add links, and it was felt that this would require a major promotional effort.

On the other hand, there was significant support for the openness of the system with respect to input by users. It was felt that there was the risk of having inappropriate material uploaded in view of the limited availability of Caribbean specific information. The view was also expressed that there would be swift reaction by other users to any abuses of the system, and that it was preferable to allow the submission of links, in the hope of increasing access to content.

One respondent offered a compromise solution and proposed that organizations be allowed to add links and that individuals be asked to submit their input (URLs) via email messages, and these could be checked prior to uploading. This of course again raises the human resource problem.

One respondent was particularly strong on the view that too much control would adversely affect the development of the system and that operating in the new age electronic environment also requires a shift in thinking to a more open and collaborative situation without rigid controls.

In this context, I would like to share an interesting concept which has been applied in management theory and specifically in the development of the Internet. Defined as **'Chaos theory,'** it defines a model of complex relationships and introduces the *'idea that change, changing conditions and creativity can enter a complex system at any point and alter its course.'*[2] The book from which this is taken goes on (Chapter 1) to discuss this in relation to the Internet in which *"everyone involved willingly conforms to certain technical specifications but to few rules."* The major point made reads as follows:
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> *"Leaders need to understand the concepts and management philosophies that drive innovation and success in the information era. It is critical to allow less control and more creativity and risk taking in everyday business."*

The majority of respondents supported this approach. There is likely to be significant growth of Caribbean web-based resources, and the CDL initiative in creating the resource which demonstrated this approach in the openness of its design should be maintained with some limited structural adjustments.

Currency

Both users and information specialists requested some further discussion on this issue. The intended focus of the CDL on 'current information' could result in older but critical information being left out. In some fields, existing information has not been updated and remains 'current.' This is a difficult issue which will require advice and decision-making by specialists in the subject field. E-mail discussion lists, already suggested as a means of resolving problems, were also suggested for this issue.

It was not clear to users whether older material is being deleted and users requested a clear statement on the website.

Copyright

As expected, this generated considerable discussion. There was concern particularly among the information professionals interviewed that the increased access to electronic information has blurred both providers' and users' responsibilities with respect to ownership, fair use, and other copyright issues.

In respect of the CDL, all respondents agreed that the original intention for the inclusion of a statement on intellectual property on the site should be met. In addition, the agreement made at the Meeting of Experts that "participating information specialists would be responsible to ensure that all resources were included in the CDL with the knowledge and approval of their parent organization," should be followed, as far as possible.

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[2] Johann Van Reenen. Digital libraries and virtual workplaces: important initiatives for Latin America in the information age. Washington, Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development, 2002.

Admittedly, the CDL objective of improving access to current Caribbean information could be offset by strict observance of copyright protocols. It is suggested that efforts be made to inform both users and input agencies of their responsibilities with respect to copyright. This would permit continued growth of the CDL while at the same time ensuring observance of copyright.

An overriding and repetitive factor was the need for increased promotion to users, possible participating agencies and other users of the CDL itself. Clearly, the copyright issue needs to be included in this promotional effort. These should be inclusive of advisory services on the laws with respect to electronic records and the existing technology for some control on use, for example, use of the technology which limits access (printing and downloading) and enforces user identification (completion of user details online) for copyrighted materials.

In addition, the maintenance of a web-based email discussion list and occasional e-conferences were suggested as promotional tools. The copyright issue could be fully explored and problems resolved by this mechanism.

Promotion and Marketing

The urgency for promoting the CDL was evident, as promotion was raised in respect of many of the issues discussed. Promotion is needed to increase use. Users need to be informed and updated to ensure use. The Consortium members or Task Force must also be reminded to add sites and to promote its use. The CDL must continually target new users. A concerted campaign for attracting the input of new sites to the CDL, particularly by specialist users, is needed.

The CDL has already explored the traditional methods of promotion, demonstrations, presentations at meetings, papers, brochures, posters, etc. Other methods may require additional funds and an increase in staff resources.

Among the suggestions made were specific programmes promoting the CDL to tertiary level institutions, the establishment of linkages, for example, with distance education programmes, the loading of materials to support the distance training courses, and the use of pop up advertisements on search engines. There was some concern that intensive marketing could affect the quality of content, where users are encouraged to add web sites which may not be of the standard required.

In the discussion on this and other issues, it was noted that the Report of the Meeting establishing the CDL, agreed that *'a manual documenting all administrative procedures of the CDL would be prepared and circulated as soon as all details of participation were worked out.'* This has not been achieved as the *'details of participation'* have indeed not been worked out.

These details need to be addressed so that the routines for shared building and promoting can be set up.

Conclusion

In conclusion, some of the succinct comments made by respondents are included here as they provide perhaps a better picture of the use and demand on the CDL.

Comments by respondents

'The links to official government sites is very useful.'

'I am committed to the concept of the CDL, I think it is a dynamic development by the Documentation Centre.'

'The feedback from users experiencing difficulty with accessing the site is itself an indicator of use.'

'The scope was expanded based on user demand.'

'The CDL is a dynamic development. The focus on the Caribbean countries is very important and now gives a different perspective on the ECLAC website. Prior to this, the "C" in the acronym ECLAC suggested that it was a lower case 'c.' '

'The CDL has the potential to be a major information resource for and on the region.'

'I work as an information professional in a specialist area, and have been amazed to discover several excellent documents that I was unaware of in the field in which I work'.

'It is an excellent resource'.

'The challenge is to keep it in the public view'

'The CDL should be expanded as the technology permits to include video, images and radio.'

'The subject fields should be defined by a scope note'

'All staff members (other than Documentation Centre) should assist in promoting the CDL.'

'The possibility of adding links is a useful feature.'

Summary

- Overall, There was agreement that the CDL is an excellent resource with the possibility of becoming a major Caribbean information resource.

- ECLAC should seek to enhance the development of the CDL as an ongoing service from the CDC. It should do so as an enhanced regional project, with the appropriate funding and human resources.

- The support of regional governments and institutions should be sought.

- The voluntary nature of the Consortium should be replaced by a properly appointed Task Force.

- The model of the Social Sciences Information Gateway (www.sosig.ac.uk) of the Resource Discovery Network (www.rdn.ac.uk) should be used in the further development of the CDL.

- The guidelines and methods used by the SOSIG could provide guidance for enhanced development.

- The openness of the system which permits users to add links to the site should be maintained.

- The coverage should be expanded to include new areas such as full text journals and electronic 'grey literature.'

- The scope should also be expanded to include both directories and guides and the structure of the site should indicate the different resources available.

- ECLAC should seek to facilitate regional discussions and participation in the CDL through use of e-mail discussion lists and e-conferences.

- Considerable effort should be made to promote the CDL by all ECLAC personnel using both traditional and new methods of promotion.

Annex 1.

Survey Instrument

Assessment of the Impact of the Caribbean Digital Library (http:cdl.eclacpos.org)

I have been asked to assist in an assessment of the impact of the Caribbean Digital Library established by ECLAC under its information portfolio. The assessment is focused on **user reaction** to the service and on the technical and management structure, and will not attempt to evaluate statistics on usage. The approach is a practical one and seeks to obtain information on the effectiveness of the operations of the CDL and in meeting user needs.

In order to assist respondents to provide their assessment of the service, notes on the various aspects of the CDL are provided for those users who may not be familiar with the background to the CDL development. The assessment will target both information specialists, staff members of the ECLAC Caribbean Documentation Centre, personnel at ECLAC and users.

All interviewees are asked to respond as freely as they can. Users' practical anecdotes on their experience of using the CDL would be particularly welcomed.

1. Objective/Concept
The CDL was established in keeping with ECLAC's commitment to be an information resource for the region, and was seen as a logical development to the CARISPLAN system, (a cooperative bibliographic database of Caribbean materials in the social sciences).
User reactions to CARISPLAN noted the difficulty in accessing the full text of documents in the database for users outside ECLAC.

2. Structure
The agreement establishing the CDL committed a number of agencies to work on a Steering Committee responsible for documenting the procedures and processes. The concept of national focal points (as obtained in the CARISPLAN structure) was also accepted, with the idea of a shared cooperative responsibility for input to the CDL.
The system was initially designed to facilitate direct uploading of relevant documents, with later verification at ECLAC. This was subsequently changed and there is no routine process of verification.

3. Content
The agreed scope was broadly "all subjects of importance to the Caribbean Development, in English, Spanish, French and Dutch." Initially 17 subject areas were listed, and this was later expanded to 27 subject areas. (See attached).

4. Technical Backbone
It was agreed that the CDL would be equipped with a search engine.

5. Geographical Spread
The focus of the CDL would extend to all the countries of the Caribbean covered by the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee.

6. Currency
It was agreed that the focus would be on current information, and that older retrospective documents and data would be included only where these were of exceptional value.

7. Integrity of Links
ECLAC undertakes the input of links for its own documents and for other selected subject areas. ECLAC also tries to maintain a check on the URLs which it adds to the CDL. Staff time has been a constraint.

8. Methodology for Additional Input
In addition to the links added by ECLAC (and the potential input of members of the Steering Committee) the system is also designed to allow the addition of relevant links by any user. It was assumed that researchers would willingly add links for resources known to them. There has been little response to this by users.

9. Quality Control
The issue of quality of the content of the resources as well as the standards and procedures for contributing to the CDL were discussed at the Meeting of Experts which led to the establishment of the CDL.

10. Copyright and other Legal Implications
It was agreed that a clear statement on the CDL website would outline the consortium's position on copyright, and that legal opinion would be sought on the laws regarding electronic resources with respect to the CDL. It was also agreed that participating information specialists would be required to ensure that items were added to the CDL with the full knowledge and approval of their parent organization.

Other Issues/Questions on Which Respondents Should Comment

11. Comparison with a similar Model, e.g., the Caribbean Virtual Health Library

12. Input by users – have you added any links to the CDL?

13. What would you identify as indicators of impact – e.g., recommendation by another user?

14. What are the challenges faced by the CDL?

15. What are the potential new developments?

16. What does emerging technology offer to the CDL?

17. What methods of promotion would you suggest?

18. Metadata – would you expect the CDL to add metadata for the URLs?

19. Do you have the tools and equipment to access the CDL?

20. Are the subject fields relevant? Too broad?

21. Are areas of coverage well defined?

22. Are there comparable digital libraries in the same field?

23. Has the information contributed in any way to your work?

24. Is there evidence of any changes based on information provided?

25. Are you aware of increased capacity in any institution as a result of information provided?

26. Has information strengthened capacity of individuals in the subject areas?

Responses to:

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<u>Annex 2</u>

List of Persons Interviewed

ECLAC Personnel
Ms. Sandra John
Ms. Ingrid Prescott
Ms. Wendy Jones
Mr. Dale Alexander
Ms. Ayanna Scoon
Mr. Arthur Grey
Ms. Helen McBain
Mr. Michael Hendrickson
Mr. Radcliffe Dookie
Mr. Anthony Mitchell
Ms. Nicole Hunt

Other Users, Information Professionals, Consortium Members

Mrs. Audrey Chambers
Information Manager, Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social & Economic Studies, UWI, Mona, Jamaica

Dr. Vasantha Chase
Director, Natural Resources Management Unit, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, Saint Lucia

Mrs. Carol Collins
Information Consultant, Jamaica. Tel. 876 925 8801

Mrs. Claudia De Four
UWI Library, St. Augustine

Mrs. Claudette De Freitas
Information Manager, CARDI, St. Augustine.

Ms. Fay Durrant
Professor & Head of School of Library Studies, UWI, Mona, Jamaica

Ms. Michelle Gill
Student, UWI Library School, UWI, Mona, Jamaica

Mrs. Kathleen Helenese-Paul
Librarian, West Indian Collection, UWI, St. Augustine

Ms. Anne Lewis
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Dominica

Ms. Elizabeth Parsan
Consultant, Tel: 638 5406

Mrs. Lucia Phillip
Director, Information Networks Division, NALIS, Trinidad

Ms. Lynda Quamina
Documentalist, School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine

Mr. Roderick Sanatan
Administration, UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados

Ms. Wendy Sealy
Information Manager, Caribbean Development Bank, Barbados

Mrs. Naula Williams
Information Manager, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, Saint Lucia

Mrs. Sue Wong
Information Consultant, Antigua