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REPORT OF THE JOINT SEMINAR OF THE LATIN AMERICAN DEMOGRAPHIC CENTER (CELADE)
AND THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAMME FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES (PROLAP)
INFORMATION ON POPULATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

(Santiago, Chile, 28 - 31 July, 1987)

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JOINT CELADE-PROLAP SEMINAR
POPULATION INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT
28-31 July 1987

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

1. The Seminar on "POPULATION INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT", jointly organized by the Latin American Demographic Center (CELADE) and the Latin American Programme for Population Activities (PROLAP) was held in Santiago, Chile, from Tuesday 28th to Friday 31st July, at ECLAC Headquarters. After the opening statements, 1/ the authorities of the Seminar were elected and the (see Annex I), and the Annotated Provisional Agenda approved (Annex II).
2. The Seminar was attended by 58 representatives (Annex IV) from 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries belonging to 42 governmental, inter-governmental and private institutions, all of which work in the field of population and cover various aspects of economic and social development. Approximately 60 per cent of the participants were social scientists and other users of population data and the rest were documentalists, programmers and system analysts.

Discussion of present conditions, problems and needs

3. After discussing Seminar Document No.1, "Information on Population in Latin America and the Caribbean: Designing a Strategy for the Next Decade", participants agreed that the long-term goals related to bibliographical and numerical population data in the Region were to achieve the consolidation of institutional capabilities and, through this, a sound and efficient collaboration between concerned institutions enabling the implementation of adequate cooperation systems.
4. In order to develop a strategy and prepare specific projects to achieve the above-mentioned goals, the work of the Seminar was organized as follows: firstly, and taking into account the parameters defined in Seminar Document No.1, the needs and problems at institutional, national and regional level from the point of view of users of population data were reviewed. Later the technological advances presented in Seminar Document No.2 "Information Technologies" and in a telecommunications demonstration to visualize a

1/ Mr. Robert Brown, Deputy Executive Secretary for Co-operation and Support Services of ECLAC, Mr. Alfredo Lattes, General Coordinator of PROLAP, and Mr. Reynaldo Bajraj, Director of CELADE. Expressions of thanks were extended to the International Development Research Center (IDRC/CIID) of Canada and to the Rockefeller Foundation for their direct contributions to the Seminar, as well as to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for their support to the work carried out.

possible contribution of the advances in this field to the solution of the problems identified, were examined. Finally, the Seminar re-assessed the problems and needs -from the point of view of data experts- of the collection of information, as well as the organization, processing and dissemination of population data. A working group for each of these subjects was then set up.

5. The users' point of view was highlighted by the summaries of the reports of the institutions invited to the Seminar, presented by five panelists. These summaries were prepared following a common pattern that had been previously distributed. The reports and their presentation were grouped according to the nature of the institution: government agencies, family planning and other action programmes, universities, non-profit private institutions, and regional and international organizations. The working groups analyzed and discussed both the problems identified and the proposals submitted in the reports.

6. The primary task of reviewing the problems in the field of population information and developing strategies that included proposals for specific projects was carried out by the following working groups.

1. Collection and gathering of information;
2. Organization and data processing; and
3. Publication or dissemination of information.

7. These working groups, conducted by a moderator and a rapporteur (Annex III), reported their discussions at plenary sessions, thus ensuring an adequate coverage of the subjects assigned to each of them. Subsequently the working groups submitted their conclusions, informed on the issues that had arisen during the plenary discussions, and the suggestions presented in the institutional papers.

Activities in the field of population

8. The meeting underscored the proliferation of institutions working in population and related areas during the last decade, both in the public and private sectors, including family planning agencies in this latter group. It was agreed that these institutions' performance had improved and become increasingly specialized owing to the use and application of new technologies for numerical and bibliographical data processing, resulting in a high volume of information in this field.

9. Educational programmes, in-training service, family planning activities, research and actions in population matters are carried out by government agencies, universities, and non-profit private institutions. A notorious increase in the activities of this last group has been observed.

Communication among institutions working in population activities

10. While the formal channels for obtaining general information on certain topics are publications lists, participation in seminars, workshops, etc., more specific and inaccessible information is usually procured through the "informal network" of personal contacts.

11. Lately, the centers participating in CELADE/DOCPAL have been increasingly able to collect, process and disseminate population information generated in their countries. In order to achieve this objective the centers establish contacts among them and with CELADE, adopting the methodologies used by CELADE-DOCPAL.

12. Participants were highly interested in the regional information networks for various fields of activity mentioned during the Seminar, such as REDUC for education research, INFOPLAN for planning, and others. Large part of the discussions focused on issues concerning population (DOCPAL, CIMAL, IPPF, POPLINE, APLIC, etc.) and there was evidence that the United Nations Population Data Network (POPIN) has been under-utilized.

13. CELADE has developed a series of programmes for numerical data processing in the Region and distributed them to users in governmental and private institutions. This has been a key contribution for an improved handling of population data. Lately these programmes have been included in the courses organized by CELADE.

14. It was agreed that the Latin American Programme on Population Activities (PROLAP), assembling 40 private centers and universities, is the appropriate forum for bringing together, reviewing and promoting joint regional information projects. Participants expressed their interest in the Programme and suggested that PROLAP should be responsible for establishing contacts with institutions from other related sectors and subject areas that could assist in carrying out these activities.

Population data availability and processing

15. The numerical data required by users in this field are found in censuses, surveys, projections, tabulations, etc., and it was acknowledged that partial or delayed data processing hinders research and studies. This occurs despite the existence of processing packages and is usually due to inadequate budgets or political and administrative constraints within the countries themselves.

16. In certain instances private organizations do not have access to the information generated by public agencies and, in others, the latter sell their information thus rendering it inaccessible to many users.

17. In the case of bibliographical data processing, automation has been postponed due to the high cost of large computer hardware. The acquisition of microcomputers by institutions dealing with population data is seen as a very favourable step, in addition to the MICROISIS processing package developed by UNESCO, Paris, which will enable the accelerated processing and dissemination of such data. However, some participants expressed their concern over the maintenance of this package in the future.

Human resources for information on population tasks

18. The lack of personnel qualified in bibliographical and numerical management techniques and knowledgeable in the field of population, limits the collection of information and delays its processing and dissemination. On the

other hand, qualified personnel shift to other jobs owing to uncertain labour conditions and low salaries in this field, resulting in a serious interruption of work already in progress.

19. The way in which users acquire knowledge is closely associated to the way they handle numerical and bibliographical information sources and their appropriate use. Hence, the user's ability to handle both types of information is extremely important.

Problems related to "capturing" or obtaining information

20. Diversification of communication among the various centers and contacts with other data networks are essential in "capturing" information on population matters such as habitat, health, agriculture, urban activity, women, etc.

21. Bibliographical information collected by the centers should be complemented with reference information, e.g. directories of individuals and institutions, project and on-going research files, etc.

22. The increasing cost of obtaining information is a barrier for the updating of collections. This occurs in every sector (government institutions, private organizations and universities) including international organizations.

Difficulties with respect to the organization and processing of information

23. Technological advances are not always available to all centers engaged in the above activities owing to a shortage of human and financial resources. Scarcity of funds to set up a minimum infrastructure containing modern technical elements hinders the organization and processing of information, as well as its dissemination.

24. Occasionally the absence of standards and regulations on data processing and transfer of numerical and bibliographical information from one center to another and to potential users prevents the timely and efficient use of information.

Problems related to the dissemination of information

25. A lack of handbooks for users on data centers is a disadvantage for the correct utilization of bibliographical resources. The same occurs with numerical data.

26. High postal and conventional communications system rates, in general, have become an obstacle for fast and continuous communication among regional centers.

Recommendations

27. Based on the analysis of the current situation and of the Region's problems and future needs, the Seminar agreed upon a general strategy

consisting in the creation of a decentralized regional network associated to specific activities on processing, training and dissemination of information.

Creation of the network

28. In order to establish a fluent communication among centers working on population programmes, as regards exchange of information and incorporation of the appropriate and feasible technological advances of the region, the Seminar recommended the creation of a "Latin American and Caribbean Population Information Network" in order to strengthen interdisciplinary links. The network should cover national networks, governmental institutions, universities and private organizations, including producers and users of bibliographical and numerical information on population.

29. The Seminar proposed the leadership of PROLAP and CELADE for the creation of the network. The network would be based on the prevailing association among PROLAP members and the centers working with CELADE/DOCPAL. Efforts should be made to extend the network to all the institutions of the Region interested in participating. CELADE and PROLAP should attempt to find the necessary financing both for the establishment of the network and its activities. It was also suggested that the regional network be connected to similar networks in other geographical areas through POPIN's network.

30. At the institutional level, it was recommended that each center should process, control and disseminate its own bibliographical output in order to exchange it with the other centers of the network through the regional database (see paragraph 32, point d)).

31. At the national level, the Seminar recommended that, under favourable conditions, CELADE and PROLAP together with other centers engaged in population activities in the country should choose a center to act as co-ordinator with a view to promoting information activities. It was also suggested that the co-ordinating center should have a Technical Advisory Committee in which other participating centers would be represented.

32. At the regional level, the Seminar recommended reinforcing PROLAP's and CELADE/DOCPAL's joint action during the next three to five years in order to enable them to engage in the following activities:

- (a) To promote and co-ordinate development of the various national networks.
- (b) To provide technical assistance to national promotional centers. These, in turn, should offer assistance to other national centers.
- (c) To extend the coverage of PROLAP's Bulletin so it may become the network's interdisciplinary dissemination publication.
- (d) To use CELADE/DOCPAL's bibliographical database to receive and disseminate bibliographical information processed by the national networks throughout the Region and the world.

- (e) To use the "POPIN Thesaurus: Multilingual Thesaurus on Population" for the analysis (indixation) of the contents of bibliographical output.

Specific Projects and Activities of the Network

33. Network regulations: In order to facilitate the exchange of information within the network, the Seminar recommended that the procedures to access MICROISIS (CDS/ISIS for microcomputers developed by UNESCO, Paris) adapted to the Bibliographical System of the ECLAC System methodology used by CELADE/DOCPAL to store and retrieve bibliographical data be made available to member centers.

34. Training: Training both of data users and experts is a key element of the strategies for improving access to information on population. It was recommended that CELADE and PROLAP together with the members of the network be in charge of the coordination of the following activities:

35. Training activities for population data experts:

- (a) National and regional courses on subjects such as organization of bibliographical and numerical data banks; application of MICRO-ISIS package; and use of REDATAM for the dissemination of geographically disaggregated census data.
- (b) Preparation of teaching material for "distance" training, including tutorships based on the use of microcomputers and, if possible, including artificial intelligence techniques.
- (c) Advisory services by experts and in-training service in appropriate centers for individuals working in information on the population field.

36. Training activities for population data users:

- (a) Introduction of training on the use of bibliographical and numerical information in national and regional population courses. It was suggested that PROLAP could stimulate this activity through its educational area.
- (b) Preparation of handbooks for researchers and other users working in the population field in order to help them use available data efficiently.

37. Communication: The use of electronic mail for the exchange of information on population and to facilitate communication among the network's members was recommended. However, given the number of telecommunication options available the most adequate system must be chosen with the assistance of experienced institutions.

38. Data collection: Domestic networks must endeavour to expand and increase the gathering or collection of data, particularly of information

contained in unpublished documents over which there is little or no control ("grey literature"). It was recommended that within each country the identification of such material should be the responsibility of national institutions; that the domestic network develop the necessary procedures to enable users to access such material in the country, and that the material considered relevant should be entered into the regional database (see paragraph 32, point d)).

39. Dissemination of information: It was recommended that institutions belonging to the information on population network should endeavour to increase dissemination of information through the following activities of the network.

40. Bibliographical information:

- (a) Expanded access to the CELADE/DOCPAL database by using technologies suited to the conditions of the various centers (e.g. microfiches, microcomputer disks or use of CD-ROM).

41. Numerical information:

- (a) Promotion of a pilot project to explore the various possibilities of distributing numerical data in massive storage means that can be accessed by microcomputers.
- (b) Improving access to numerical data of censuses, surveys and other sources generated by public institutions, with a view to strengthening domestic networks of institutions engaged in population activities through inter-institutional agreements between the generating centers and users.
- (c) Recommending National Statistic Offices to identify the necessary mechanisms -through the Secretariat of the Interamerican Conference on Statistics of the OAS- to make both census and specific survey data available to users at microdata level.

42. Reference database: Create a reference database containing information on research, researchers, databases and computer equipment and programmes used by the network member centers. It was recommended to refer to the work already carried out on this subject by PROLAP's Training and Research Areas.

43. Other: The Seminar suggested the following steps to secure financial support for the centers' information activities:

- (a) The allocation of a percentage (3 to 5%) of research or other activities' budgets to cover the collection, organization and dissemination of information on population.
- (b) To encourage a stronger institutional and financial support for the development of information and documentation units by funding organizations and national agencies.

Annex I

Authorities of the Seminar

Chairman : Graciela Fernández Baca de Valdez

First Vice-Chairman : Alfredo Lattes

Second Vice-Chairman : Arthur M. Conning

Third Vice-Chairman : Luis Brahm

General Rapporteur : Gabriel Bidegain

Annex II

Annotated Provisional Agenda

1. OPENING CEREMONY

2. ELECTION OF AUTHORITIES

Pursuant to the resolution of the Joint Secretariat of the Seminar (CELADE-PROLAP), a Chairman, three Vice-Chairmen and a General Rapporteur must be elected among the representatives attending the Seminar.

3. ADOPTION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

The Provisional Agenda may be approved as submitted or with the amendments the participants may deem appropriate.

4. DIAGNOSIS OF THE USE OF INFORMATION ON POPULATION: ACTIVITIES IN THE PREVIOUS DECADE AND FUTURE DEMANDS

Review of regional conditions with emphasis on "the fields of use": education, research, development planning and operation (action programmes). Both bibliographical and numerical information on population will be examined.

(a) Presentation and discussion of Seminar Document No.1: Information on Population in Latin America and the Caribbean: Designing a Strategy for the Next Decade.

Presentation of Seminar Document by CELADE and PROLAP, prepared with the information provided by the centers participating in the CELADE/DOCPAL network and in PROLAP, and delivered by other institutions, attempting to formulate a reference framework for the Seminar's activities.

(b) Presentation of summaries of institutional papers

Submission of summaries of institutional papers by five panelists. Each panelist shall represent one of the following groups of institutions: (i) governmental planning, political and data collection bodies; (ii) action-oriented programmes including family planning, mother-child health care, and others; (iii) universities; (iv) private research institutions; (v) funding organizations and other international organizations.

(c) Identification of current and future problems

Discussion to identify current and future specific problems, taking into consideration possible differences between sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean.

5. RELEVANT TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POPULATION INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

(a) Presentation of Seminar Document No.2 "Information Technologies"

A description of the relevant technological advance in the field of information on population, including the following:

- Information retrieval and processing: microcomputers and appropriate software.
- Information reproduction and storage: microfiches, optical disks, etc.
- Telecommunication.

(b) Analysis of possible technological applications

Analysis of the possible application of technology to information issues identified during the Seminar.

(c) Communication networks

Report on communication networks through telecommunications including a demonstration of the "Coordinator" system.

6. STRATEGIES FOR THE NEXT DECADE AND OUTLINES FOR SPECIFIC PROJECTS

(a) Setting-up of three Working Groups for each of the following information population areas

The following Working Groups were set up:

G1: Collection ("capturing") of available data

To establish and control information on population generated in individual countries and other areas, concerning that country and the region.

G2: Organization, storage and processing of information

To review storage techniques and handling of information in order to help users.

G3: Dissemination of information

To encourage activities in centers and countries, within and outside the region, in order to increase the number and nature of information on population users, attempting to improve self-supply by users making available simple information processing and handling techniques. After examining regional conditions (considering the participants' individual contributions) each Working Group will propose strategies for the next decade and outlines for the implementation of practical projects, taking into account the relevant technologies available.

(b) Team work

Working Groups will submit progress reports after each meeting (end of the morning and end of the afternoon) to the rest of the participants in plenary sessions.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) Draft Preliminary Report

A draft preliminary report covering the conclusions and recommendations of the Working Groups and the Plenary Sessions (Heads of Groups, Rapporteurs and other authorities elected during the Seminar) shall be prepared.

(b) Approval of the Seminar Report

The preliminary report and recommendations shall be approved, if possible, by consensus, with a view to guiding participants in the formulation of specific actions, emphasizing collaboration at national, regional and international level.

Annex III

Working Groups List

Group 1

Collection ("capturing") of available data

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Rapporteur: Señora Hebe Rolón (BASE, PY)

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Pilotti, Francisco (IIN, UY)
Prat, Ana María (CONICYT, CL)
Ramírez, Moisés (MIPPE, PA)
Shomaly, Denise (CIM, CL)

Group 2

Organization, storage and processing of information

Moderator: Sr. Abel Packer (BIREME, BR)

Rapporteur: Sr. Julio Rosenblatt (IIN, UY)

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Group 3

Dissemination of information

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Rapporteur: Señora María Rebeca Yáñez (CIM, CL)

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