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JOINT UPU/CEPAL PROPOSAL

ON

POSTAL SERVICES



UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

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JOINT UPU/CEPAL PROPOSAL ON
POSTAL SERVICES

Introduction

Under UNDP Project (RLA 75/051) the Universal Postal Union (UPU) is giving assistance to Postal Administrations in CARICOM countries to promote the development and organization of postal services on modern lines and to bring up-to-date accounting methods which will enable individual countries to obtain all payments for mail handlings due to them under UPU regulations from other postal administrations, mainly the United Kingdom, Canada, and the U.S.A. The project is also designed to promote closer working cooperation and coordination within the region to eliminate as far as possible duplication of effort.

Following a technical evaluation of the individual Postal Administrations, it has been recommended that a restricted postal union be established. This would enable preferential tariffs to be made between members, would coordinate training of postal workers and establish a nucleus of expertise to help member countries to keep up-to-date with modern postal practices. This is currently under consideration by CARICOM.

During 1977 the project was able to assist in the recovery of outstanding debts, from overseas administrations, amounting to US\$4m. The technical evaluation also revealed major problems in the flow of mail both between CARICOM countries and to and from Europe and North America.

While this work has concerned itself only with CARICOM Member States, it is felt that similar problems exist in the whole of the CDCC region since the original CDCC Meeting in Havana noted that "telephone, telegraph and postal services are still very deficient.

Improvement in these fields would result in increased relations and would facilitate the implementation of programmes and projects which fall within the scope of the Committee. It is therefore necessary to study ways of improving these services through the adoption of adequate measures". ^{1/}

The problem with Postal Services was again noted at the Meeting in Santo Domingo and it is therefore proposed that Post Office Users' Councils be established by each CDCC Member State to consider representations by users of post office services and to comment on any major changes proposed by the post office. These Councils would fulfill the role envisaged for the "Working Groups" mentioned in the Report of the Second Session of the CDCC. ^{2/}

Postal Service Problems in the CDCC Area

Some of the more significant problems are:-

- Outgoing surface mail is often subject to severe delays due to a lack of regular and reliable shipping service;
- Service delays to airmail caused by either inadequate capacity on aircraft or by inadequate forwarding arrangements by individual administrations.

^{1/} E/CEPAL/1010, E/CEPAL/CDCC/8/Rev.1 Report of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee - Annex 3 Work Programme Section H. Transport, Communications and related services.

^{2/} E/CEPAL/1039, E/CEPAL/CDCC/21/Rev. 1, Annex 1, Item H 5.

- Unexplained losses of valuable mail whilst intransit by air;
- Wide disparities between and within countries of the quality of delivery services;
- Counter services are often inadequate due to poor accommodation and bad staff attitudes;
- Severe operating problems are caused by the lack of adequate equipment especially for the transport of mail by road.

Problems such as these result in a low quality of mail service which manifest themselves in the public view in unexplained delays and losses. This can result in severe discontent and there is currently no mechanism for redress.

This lack of suitable mechanism results in varying degrees in ill-feeling against the Post Office and its employees, a mistrust of the system and consequently the Post Office itself lacks credibility in the eyes of the public. This in turn makes the Post Office defensive and causes low staff morale. The only redress is to attempt to pressure for change through letters to newspapers.

There is the need for a system whereby complaints can be monitored and acted upon, suggestions for improved service can be considered, the Post Office can be protected from unwarranted criticism and can seek reaction from the public on proposed service improvements.

POST OFFICE USERS' COUNCILS

It can be fairly said that postal services - their efficiency and cost, affect most people. Yet the users of the services, who are of course the providers of the money with which the services are financed have only at best a very indirect influence on the quality and cost of the services for which they pay.

It is therefore proposed that the CDCC Governments establish Post Office Users' Councils to overcome these difficulties.

There would be two levels of Council, National and Regional.

NATIONAL COUNCIL

Purpose and Function

Each CDCC member would establish a National Council to assist in the formation of policy design of postal services, and particularly the quality of service provided. It is particularly important for the Post Office and the Government to have a two-way channel of communication with customers.

To facilitate an exchange of views, matters relating to Post Office services could be referred to the Council by the Post Office, or the Minister responsible for Postal Affairs or by any individual or group of users of the services.

The National Councils would receive complaints and suggestions concerning the whole range of postal services. Problems which are of a purely national nature could be dealt with by the Council and the Chairman could attempt to resolve these by holding discussions with the Postmaster General at regular meetings. On matters relating to Government Policy the Chairman would have access to the responsible Ministers. An important aspect is that the results of the inquiries are communicated to the originator of the complaint or suggestion.

Matters of regional or international significance would be referred to the Regional Council for consideration.

Composition

The National Council would have a Chairman appointed from all walks of life so that they represent a good cross-section of the community and users of postal services. These members may be drawn

from local authorities and other public bodies representing both commercial and private users of the post. It is particularly important that the small private users shall be seen to be well represented.

THE REGIONAL COUNCIL

Scope and Function

Because of the historical, cultural and commercial links with overseas countries it follows that overseas mail represents by far the larger proportion of mail handled in the region. The efficient performance of these postal services is usually beyond the control of individual countries, and will be affected by methods of transport both by air and by sea.

The Regional Council would therefore represent member countries in all postal matters other than those of a purely domestic nature. This Council would be the focus of difficulties experienced by individual countries following large-scale failures by airlines and shipping companies to provide an adequate service for mail entrusted to them.

Organization

The Regional Council would have a representative from each member country (probably the Chairman of the National Council). It would elect from amongst its members a Regional Council Chairman who would be assisted by a small secretariat in processing matters raised at the Regional Council for action. The Secretariat could be provided initially by CDCC. The workload should not be heavy, and the incidence of Regional Council Meeting would be perhaps annually.

Operational Aspects

The Regional Council could be expected to deal with matters affecting international mail and matters influenced by circumstances outside of the individual country's control. Some of these problems could be resolved by the Secretariat under the guidance of the Regional Chairman and others would be reserved for consideration at the full regional meeting.

The Regional Council would likely be concerned with problems affecting the transit of mail in the region and to countries outside of the region. It should have power to make representations to airlines where the performance is adversely affecting mail services.

The Regional Council might also consider methods of improving services by the gradual abolition of surface mail within the region. It should be possible to carry all mail in the region by air at little or no additional cost.

Conclusions

It is proposed that:

1. CDCC Member Governments establish a National Post Office Users' Council. Assistance in this respect may be provided by the CDCC Secretariat and the UPU.
2. CDCC Member Governments nominate a Chairman of the National Body who will represent his country at the Regional Council level.
3. A Regional Council Meeting to discuss Regional and International Postal problems be held as early as possible at a location to be decided.

Time-table of Action

1. CDCC Member Governments should establish National Post Office Users' Councils as soon as possible. If this step requires legislation the CDCC Secretariat and UPU would be ready to supply support to Governments on request.

2. In advance of deciding the membership of the Councils, Governments should consider potential candidates for the Office of National Chairman so that he may represent his government at the inaugural regional meeting if that will probably be held before the National Council can be formally established. The nominee might also assist in the selection of members of his own National Council.

3. While there are some advantages in establishing the National Councils in advance of the Regional Council, there also are some advantages in establishing the Regional Council before the National Councils. In the former case the Regional Council could commence its work on the basis of submissions from the National Councils; in the latter case the Regional Council could articulate the scope of its activities and provide orientation for the national councils, thereby providing an element of coordination from the outset.

Requirements for a Regional Meeting

1. CDCC Member Governments should nominate a representative to attend the meeting. Ideally, he should be the Chairman/Chairman Designate of the National Council.

2. It is expected that the meeting would require:-

- (a) Conference and some support facilities for a meeting of about 20 to be provided by a host government;

- (b) some translation facilities (English, French and Spanish) may be needed beyond what the CDCC Secretariat itself can provide;
- (c) convenient hotel facilities for delegates to reduce costs of transportation to conference site.

3. CDCC Member countries would be expected to defray travelling and hotel expenses for their own delegates. The meeting would not be expected to last more than 3 days. This will keep the cost to individual countries to a minimum.

4. CDCC and UPU would meet their own costs including secretarial services for this inaugural meeting.

Examples of Postal Operational shortcomings which
might not occur or could be avoided by the exist-
ence of Users' Councils

1. Following the recent interruption of air services by a major airline, mail was allowed to accumulate at one of the more important airports for three weeks before it was moved by another airline. $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton of mail for Europe was delayed despite the fact that there were other airlines operating over the same route.
2. Disparities in delivery services in one country result from a dependence on a bus service to carry mail. One part of the island receives a daily delivery, whilst the other receives mail on a thrice weekly service on those days on which buses operate. An additional mail van would resolve this disparity and greatly improve services.
3. At one Post Office surface mail has been known to wait up to a year for a sea outlet to a nearby island. Sea services are irregular and masters of ships are known to dislike carrying mail because the freight rates offered are low and mail poses security problems. Regional Ship operators are trying to help following representations, but their schedules are often irregular and mail cannot be made ready before departure. Users' Councils might be stimulated to press for the abolition of surface mail in the region and insist on air carriage of all mail circulating within the region.
4. Surface mail communication with the French and Dutch Islands is so poor that the normal route for this mail is via Europe. This is a similar problem to 3 above.

5. Counter services also suffer. During the recent Christmas rush in at least one country there was insufficient ready cash to enable the public to encash Postal Orders received by post. Long queues and waiting times of up to 3 hours were common, resulting in bad tempers and unpleasant relations between staff and public. All this despite a large cash advance having been received by the Post Office from a metropolitan country to meet the situation. It was said that the money had been appropriated by Government for other purposes.

6. In at least one country there are regular interruptions to counter service following power failures. The staff refuse to work in poor light - but there is no attempt to provide emergency lighting of even a rudimentary kind. Public relations are soured by this.

7. One philatelic bureau in a Post Office although notionally open for business on Saturday morning persistently refuses to sell stamps - Saturdays being reserved for "balancing the books".

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