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THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM-PLANNING
Design Principles, Activities and Perspectives

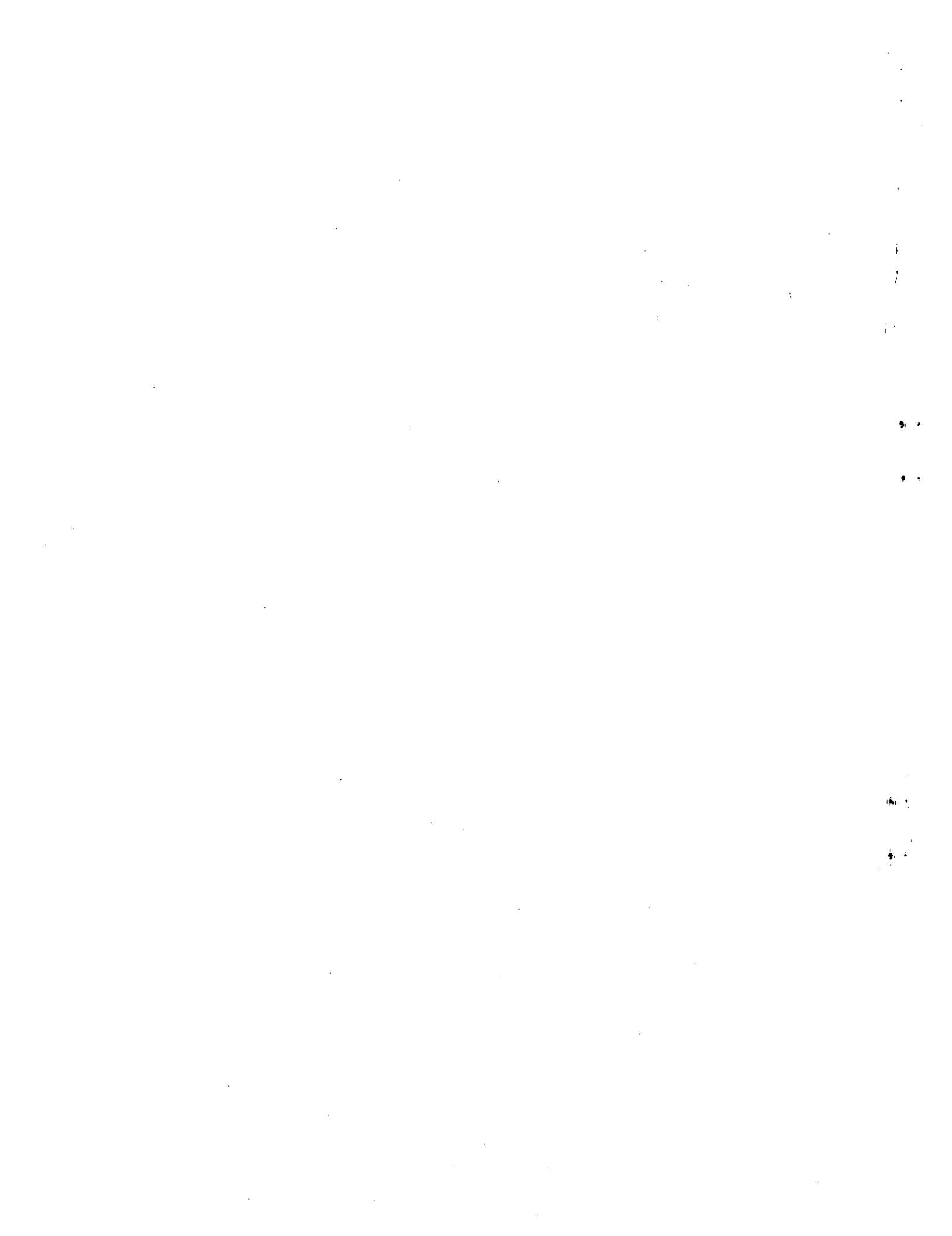
Prepared by

Wilma Primus
Librarian/Documentalist



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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean



THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM -
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PLANNING SECTOR:
Design Principles, Activities and Perspectives

by

Wilma Primus
Documentalist
Caribbean Documentation Centre

The First Meeting of Caribbean Planning Officials identified the problem of inadequate information as a major obstacle to development planning in the Caribbean and recommended that the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC) strengthen the Caribbean Documentation Centre in its efforts to develop a Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning (CARISPLAN). The Meeting further indicated that the Centre's work should be closely linked with the CEPAL/CLADES/ILPES Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean (INFOPLAN). The CDCC at its Fourth Session held in Suriname in April 1979, endorsed these recommendations and instructed the ECLA Office for the Caribbean to hasten implementation of the System.

This paper examines the principles and strategies on which the Caribbean Information System is based, and reports on the activities undertaken by the Caribbean Documentation Centre and national participating centres during the past year to assist in the development of the network.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

In designing the information system for planners, decision-makers and project administrators, high consideration was given to the value of information as a national resource which must be exploited for the economic and social advancement of every Caribbean country.

In order to identify the needs of a country, or assess the impact of utilizing scarce resources for potentially competing activities, decision-makers require reliable information. The existence of this information implies that an investment of time and money was made to produce it. This information - whether it relates to feasibility

studies, national and sectoral policies, commission reports, project appraisals, studies produced for and during international meetings, such as those presented to this Meeting - is usually in the form of documents. If the existence of these documents is unknown, considerable investments in time and money are duplicated in regenerating the information.

Further, the continued growth of planning documents and the marked increase in the number of statistical publications produced by the institutions which feed the decision-making process, make it imperative for steps to be taken to ensure that information, once collected, is used for future applications in order to recover the high cost.

This national information is also of strategic value, in that its acquisition places the buyer in a better bargaining position in negotiations with particular countries.

Based on this first principle of the value of information as a national resource, the Caribbean Information System was designed to promote in CDCC member states the collection and preservation of all development planning information produced by or for these states. It was also designed to stimulate and assist these governments in the processing and dissemination of this information to decision-makers, planners, researchers and administrators in order to create an awareness of the resource and its subsequent utilization.

A second consideration, in the design of the system, and the fillip for its creation, is the expressed wish of Caribbean governments for horizontal co-operation in the sub-region and the need to build on the expertise and experiences of member countries, thereby stimulating the process of endogenous development and the creation of greater self-reliance.

The CDCC was established as an instrument for the promotion of co-operation and the integration process in the Caribbean. Its Secretariat was instructed to utilize existing experiences in the Caribbean integration process, e.g. those of CARICOM, ECCM. In pursuit of its work programme to support this intra-Caribbean technical co-operation, the Secretariat was specifically directed to expedite the process of mutual exchange, eliminate deficiencies in communication, data gathering and distribution of information

among Caribbean countries, and to establish a system for collecting technological and methodological data on the Caribbean, working in close collaboration with the universities and research institutes.

Based on this second principle of intra-Caribbean technical co-operation and overall Caribbean development, the Caribbean Information System is designed to collect and preserve all Caribbean country-related documentation which would support the development and co-operation activities of the CDCC. It specifically includes inputs from Caribbean integration agencies and sub-regional bodies relating to the information which they themselves produce, and will establish links with other sub-regional sectoral information systems as they develop, since the information required by planners is multidisciplinary. The system will process and disseminate the above-mentioned information to national and sub-regional bodies so as to ensure maximum utilization.

The third principle in the design of the System is based on the need to access relevant information produced in other Third World and industrialized countries. Access to documents pertaining to other Third World countries is relevant since these documents record the experiences of countries with similar levels of development or cultural and natural environments in their efforts to solve economic problems. It is also a basic pre-requisite to horizontal co-operation programmes among developing countries. Decision-makers in developing countries also need economic and social information from industrialized countries, in that their own development depends to a great extent on trade with the more affluent countries, and it is believed that the experience of these countries can often be of value.

On the other hand, these industrialized countries have mastered the management of information and wield the balance of power in the information world. The bulk of the relevant information which they possess is not easily available to developing countries. Legal protection devices, monopoly practices, high costs, etc., are obstacles which help to widen the gap between developing and developed countries and increases dependency. The problem has been recognized in the declaration

of the New International Economic Order and steps have been taken by various international bodies to build co-operative, decentralized, international information systems which would make more of this information accessible to developing countries. In the operation of these systems, each participating organization contributes the information generated within its own country and in return receives all the information contributed by other partners after it has been assembled in a central file. The underlying concept is resource sharing and the approach is more cost effective and provides better services than under the present situation.

Links with other information systems in the rest of the world imply that the system must be designed to obtain and disseminate to national and sub-regional users a wide spectrum of information relating to countries and regions outside the Caribbean through an exchange of Caribbean social and economic information, on which a high value is placed.

Other important design considerations relate to the System's orientation to the needs of its users, and its adaptability to the environment in which it operates. While subject analysis of information is of prime importance to the planning and decision-making community, it is equally important that the information be accessible, up-to-date and timely. High consideration was therefore given to processing techniques and communication technologies which ensure a quick response. Emphasis is on indexing and abstracting and the utilization of processing techniques, such as uniterm, which will facilitate the projected transfer to automated operations. In planning for the development of the system, a phased approach was adopted in order to allow experimentation and adaptation to unforeseen environmental changes and to give staff enough time to become proficient.

In addition to these principles, other policy guidelines had to be considered. An experts' meeting, held in Port of Spain in 1977, recommended that the sub-regional system be specifically geared towards the strengthening of national information systems and the active involvement of the less developed countries and there was a firm commitment by member governments to participate actively in the development of the system. The system was therefore decentralized from the outset and efforts initiated to establish links with DEVSIS (the Development Sciences Information System) as the most appropriate system for providing the international back-up in the field of economic and social planning information.

Decentralization means that the System will foster the creation of national capabilities in order to provide information service at the point where it is most needed. It also means that there will be national autonomy as to what goes into the system and that the persons responsible for its input will be close to the producers of new information and can more effectively ensure its reporting.

Success of a decentralized system depends on the existence of a national information infrastructure. There must be a focal point to identify and collect national publications, prepare bibliographic and analytical summaries, assign indexing descriptors and organize the information for easy retrieval. It also means that in countries where the size of the planning literature is large, the focal point must have the capability to co-ordinate the documentation efforts of the information producing institutions in order to ensure complete coverage of the national literature.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM PLANNING

Against the background of these decisions and principles, the Secretariat requested support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and received an initial grant to initiate phase one of the decentralized bibliographic information system on economic and social planning in the Caribbean. In view of the fact that CEPAL/CLADES/ILPES had undertaken to design an Information System for Planning (INFOPLAN) in Latin America, the Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC), as co-ordinating centre for the Caribbean component of INFOPLAN, undertook to ensure that the activities and methodologies of CARISPLAN were closely co-ordinated with the design work being undertaken by CEPAL/CLADES/ILPES so that the procedures and techniques would be standardized for efficient transfer and access at the regional and international levels.

Users of the System

The principal users of the system at the national and regional levels are the planners, policy-makers, communicators, managers, researchers and technicians who take part in the different stages of

the planning and development process, and who in carrying out their activities, require different types of quality information. The majority of these users come from the same organizations and institutions which produce the documents - the national planning agencies, the national statistical offices, central banks, sectoral planning offices which feed the central planning agencies, universities and research centres. At the regional level the relevant institutions are the regional planning and integration agencies, e.g. CARICOM, CDB, ECCM, WISA, research institutes specializing in Caribbean problems, and international agencies operating in CDCC countries.

Scope of the System

CLADES and ILPES were concerned that the System should be user-oriented and sought the direct participation of the region's specialists in the formulation of its design. Meetings with these experts examined the planning process itself and considered the information problems involved. This process was seen as a group of actions which absorbs very specific and processed data and in turn generates fairly typical information such as national plans, sectoral plans, development programmes, etc. It requires a very wide range of information and basic statistics of a diverse nature, e.g. all existing economic and social data, basic statistics, and base studies. It draws on information from various sectors such as agriculture, industry, education, public health, transport, etc.

In addition to the data required and generated by the planning process, a need exists for theoretical, methodological data and information of a legislative nature.

The information needed is therefore qualitative and quantitative, but since different processing techniques are required to accommodate both systems, the bibliographic system CARISPLAN only indirectly supports the statistical system, in that it controls and provides the bibliographic references to existing sources of statistical data, gives the degree of break-down, the form of presentation, and the physical location of the source.

ECLA Office for the Caribbean has recognized the importance of both systems and has taken active steps to establish a statistical data bank with links to the bibliographic system. The office has been extracting data on demographic, social and economic statistics of Caribbean countries with a view to storing this data on a computer as soon as such facilities are available.

Discussions with the planners themselves further indicated that the ideal bibliographic system should be capable of registering or monitoring the entire mass of documents consumed in the planning process; a practical approach however, would be to begin by entering:

- a) development plans, programmes and projects, whether global, regional or sectoral, and budgetary documents;
- b) theoretical and methodological planning studies;
- c) historical type planning documents; and
- d) documents which describe or analyze the national planning situation in the different countries, especially those written by authors of note.

Geographical Scope

In terms of the philosophy and scope outlined, the planning data base will initially include bibliographic references and abstracts to documents produced in the Caribbean sub-region and documents published outside the sub-region but related to planning and development in the Caribbean.

Access to Latin American documentation in planning will be through INFOPLAN. Initially, access to information from the developing world and the industrialized countries will be through the INFOPLAN machinery based at CEPAL/CLADES at Santiago who will establish links with DEVSIS - international. When the Caribbean Documentation Centre acquires its own computer facility, the data bases of international organizations, such as UNIDO, UNCTAD/GATT, ILO, FAO will be obtained on a regular basis for on-line searching and the rapid provision of bibliographic information.

Boundaries with other Caribbean Systems

It is difficult to define the boundaries of CARISPLAN in relation to other Caribbean sectoral information systems, since planning is mission-oriented and draws on all sectors of economic and social activity. The situation should become clearer as other systems develop. In the meantime CARISPLAN will continue to collect information essential for decision-making in the planning community, but will negotiate its boundaries with other Caribbean sectoral information systems as soon as they are effectively developed.

At present, positive efforts are being initiated to establish Caribbean information systems in the areas of agriculture, energy and technology, trade and education.

Trade Information. A pragmatic approach in the development of the trade information system suggests that initially it should concentrate its efforts on marketing and intelligence data so as not to spread its resources too thin, leaving the documentation activities with CARISPLAN for a while, after which an evaluation can be made. It will certainly be uneconomical for staff of the national planning agency and the Ministry of Trade to index and abstract the same documents:

Energy and Technology Information. The Caribbean Development Bank has been preparing to establish a data base consisting of energy and appropriate technology information related to the CDB's work programme. The purpose of the data base will be principally to provide information to the Bank's officers and to the Bank's customers in the sub-region. CARISPLAN will utilize relevant sections of CDB's output when produced.

CDB's officials and the Caribbean Documentation Centre staff have discussed possible areas of co-operation to avoid duplication of effort especially in the LDC's where personnel and resources are limited.

Agriculture Information Network. In a primarily agricultural sub-region such as the Caribbean, access to agricultural information is crucial. Preliminary work for the development of the Caribbean Information System on Agriculture has been completed by ECLA's Office for the Caribbean. Guidelines for implementation of a sub-regional network based on AGRIS/AGRINTER have been endorsed by the Ministers of governments at the fourth session of the CDCC, and by most individual Ministries of Agriculture. A technical-level meeting is under consideration, pending external funding for the network.

When the Caribbean Information System was proposed in 1977, it was felt that the agricultural network would be the first to go on stream, since the basis for such a system already existed. Cuba was already participating in AGRIS, the international system. The Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were all members of the regional programme for agricultural information, AGRINTER. A Caribbean sub-regional network, linked to

AGRIS/AGRINTER, would provide a greater Caribbean commitment and input to the system. AGRIS Production Statistics for the period January 1975 to June 1979 reveal the following Caribbean inputs.

| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Cuba | 243 entries |
| Dominican Republic | 644 |
| Guyana | 28 |
| Haiti | 81 |
| Jamaica | 224 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 236 |

These figures in no way reflect the Caribbean contribution to knowledge in the field of agriculture.

Another area of concern for the development of sectoral information systems is the way in which the Caribbean is grouped and serviced by individual international agencies. In some cases, the Secretariat has to contact a single agency through two or more points. The CDC foresees difficulties in the co-ordination of documentation support to meet the objectives of the Committee. For example, a proposal to develop trade information services in Latin America includes Cuba and the Dominican Republic. A similar development is being considered for CARICOM countries. It is not yet decided under which group Haiti and Suriname will fall. Unless efforts are taken to ensure that the Caribbean components of both systems are merged and the product disseminated to all CDCC countries, the integration process will not be enhanced.

Language Coverage

Ideally, the system should cover all Caribbean documentation produced in the world and written in any language. Processing of such documents implies the possession of extensive language capabilities to cope with the languages in which the documents are written.

At present the System restricts itself to documents written in English, Spanish, French and Dutch - the four official languages of member states of the CDCC.

Participating centres prepare input sheets for their national literature with abstracts of the documents written in the language of their country. In the case of Suriname, however, the abstracts and indexing terms will be in English until such time as the OECD Macrothesaurus is translated into Dutch. Original language titles are retained.

Technical Aspects of the System

How does the System work? A standard worksheet designed by CLADES in consultation with the Caribbean Documentation Centre is used by all CARISPLAN centres. These worksheets are sent to the CDC for checking and are subsequently despatched to CLADES for input to CEPAL's computer in Santiago and creation of the Caribbean data base. The computer printout is sent from Santiago to the CDC for editing and return to Santiago. A revised printout is subsequently sent to the CDC for publication in multiple copies and dissemination of CARISPLAN Abstracts to planners, decision-makers, researchers, librarians, etc.

Acquisition of computer facilities at the Caribbean Documentation Centre will eliminate these lengthy procedures and ensure a speedier service.

In its proposal for the second phase of the development of the System, the CDCC Secretariat has made provision for a document delivery service to planners and their information personnel.

Management of the System

A working group consisting of representation from all participating focal points, will meet once per year to evaluate the activities of the system and to plan for its development.

ACTION TO IMPLEMENT CARISPLAN

A two week training workshop for information personnel in the national planning agencies was successfully completed in May 1979. Eleven of the eighteen (18) Caribbean countries invited to participate nominated representatives. The workshop was designed to enable participants to establish or strength national information centres and to standardize procedures for processing the planning literature in order to ensure compatibility.

The Planning Ministries were informed of the action taken to implement the system and the commitment of governments sought to enable the system to function effectively.

A Documentalist/Training Officer was appointed in August 1979 to provide training and advisory services at the national level, beginning with those countries which participated in the workshop. There were missions to thirteen (13) CDCC member states, initially to study the level of information service in the economic and social planning sector, to make recommendations for improvement, and to work with the staff at the national planning agencies in planning for the promotion of the use of information by the planning community. Discussions were held with senior planning officials advising them of the existing national situation and recommendations made for the improvement of the information situation. A written report was submitted in each instance.

A document entitled "Guidelines for the Organization and Management of an Information Centre" was prepared and distributed to the staff. At the national level the Documentalist/Trainer has assisted in the establishment or development of information centres at the Planning Ministries or the equivalent organization in thirteen countries visited.

During the brief preliminary mission to each country, assistance was given in methods of developing the information infrastructure. The second mission was a longer working session with personnel of the Planning Ministries and other related Ministries and Departments. In all the countries there was found to be a lack of access to information produced locally and about the local situation, and even where studies and reports were known to have been sent to a particular country from, for example, an international organization, these were sometimes still not accessible as there was no one information centre regarded as the focal point for this type of information. Consequently access to this much needed information has been limited.

Users needs

In response to studies of users needs, the planners and policy-makers throughout the region indicated that there was need for access to information on technical areas in which development was in progress

and that the studies and reports which had been prepared about their own countries and also about other Caribbean countries would be a great advantage to the development planning process. In several cases, the subjects on which technical personnel required information were similar from country to country.

The following is a summary report of the activities at the national level.

Antigua

The Development Planning Office is based in the Ministry of Economic Development and is an appropriate place for the location of the information centre which will serve planners, policy-makers, and other technical personnel working in the socio-economic field. Agreement has been reached on the need to establish one centre, but final arrangements still remain to be made for appointment of personnel, and allocation of space for the physical facility.

Meanwhile, the Project Officer of the Development Planning Office has been preparing bibliographic records for input to the data base of the Caribbean Information System.

Barbados

The focal point in Barbados has been established as the Ministry of Planning. A small basic collection, staffed by a clerical assistant, has undergone some development during the past year and arrangements for the appointment of professional personnel and expansion of the physical facility are expected to be completed by September of this year.

A project officer, is, as an interim measure, preparing bibliographic records for input to the Caribbean Information System - Planning. The co-ordination of the socio-economic information network was also begun.

It is envisaged that the Ministry of Planning can serve as the national focal point for the socio-economic information sector in Barbados, as well as the focal point for the regional information system. As the planning ministry is not yet able to do this the Documentalist/Trainer began co-ordination of the national socio-economic network.

There are several established information units which fall within the socio-economic sector and arrangements have been made for these to participate in the system. The final decision on the national focal point will be made by the Council recently appointed to design a national information system. However, the Ministry of Planning will continue to be a very important contributor to the system and work by the Documentalist/Trainer will continue on the development of the information centre in the Ministry of Planning.

Cuba

The focal point for the system has been established in the Junta Central de Planificación (JUCEPLAN) where an information centre staffed by professional and auxiliary staff has been established for some time.

It was therefore possible to begin working immediately on the co-ordination of the socio-economic information network in Cuba.

It will also be possible to move on to the next phase of disseminating this information which is also of importance to users.

Dominica

Arrangements were made for missions to Dominica but these had to be postponed because of other priority developments which had to be undertaken in that country. It is planned, however, to undertake missions to Dominica in the second phase of the project.

Dominican Republic

The Secretariado Técnico de la Presidencia has been proposed as the focal point in the Dominican Republic. There is already a Documentation Centre established, and work was concentrated during the mission on improving the organization of the centre and on establishing a work programme for development of the documentation centre, and for subsequent co-ordination of the socio-economic network which has not yet begun. Plans have been formalized for the design of a national information system in the Dominican Republic, and the Secretariado Técnico de la Presidencia has been proposed as the focal point for the national socio-economic network.

Arrangements are being made for further training of the staff, and for secondment of professional staff to assist in the development of the relatively new documentation centre in the Secretariado Técnico de la Presidencia.

Grenada

Two missions were undertaken to Grenada and proposals for the establishment of an information centre in the Ministry of Planning were agreed upon. Arrangements are being made to appoint personnel, and to modify the building which houses the Ministry of Planning in order to provide space for the new Information Unit which will serve the Ministry of Planning and other policy-makers and planners in the government service in Grenada.

Guyana

In Guyana the State Planning Secretariat, the national focal point for the Caribbean Information System, has made significant progress in the past year. An information centre has been established in the Secretariat, and service to the planners and policy-makers is being provided from the existing collection.

The co-ordination of the socio-economic information network has begun and contributions to the regional system are well underway.

Arrangements are being made for additional training of the personnel presently managing the information centre, and for additional technical assistance, to extend the collection and the services provided.

Haiti

The Secrétairerie d'Etat du Plan, where a documentation centre for the Ministry has been established for some years, has been proposed as the focal point for socio-economic information in Haiti, and work is now in progress on upgrading the activities of the centre and on arranging for advanced training of the staff who manage the centre at the present time. Arrangements are also being made for expansion of the physical facility. In the meanwhile, the Documentation Centre of the Secrétairerie d'Etat du Plan is contributing to the Caribbean Information System.

Jamaica

The focal point for the Caribbean Information System and for the National Information System of Jamaica is the Library and Information Centre of the National Planning Agency. During the two missions to Jamaica, assistance was given in the development of the existing unit, and arrangements were made for expansion of the physical facility, upgrading of the relevant posts and the appointment of professional staff to manage the centre. Jamaica also received financial assistance from the IDRC for the development of the information infrastructure in the National Planning Agency.

The co-ordination of the several information units within the socio-economic network was begun by the Documentalist/Trainer and contributions are being made to the system.

Suriname

In Suriname it was agreed that the Planbureau would be the location for the information unit serving as national focal point for the regional information system.

A documentation centre has been in existence for several years, and arrangements were being undertaken to strengthen the centre's resources, train staff, and integrate the centre into the Caribbean Information System.

St. Kitts-Nevis and Anguilla

Agreement was reached on the importance of establishing an Information Centre to serve the information needs of planners, policy-makers, and other technical personnel in the Government Service. Arrangements are presently being made for the provision of space and personnel for a central Information Centre. In the meantime contributions to the system are being prepared by technical personnel of the Planning Unit, and the Ministry of External Affairs.

St. Lucia

During her mission to St. Lucia, the Documentalist/Training Officer worked at the Central Planning Unit on organizing the collection which is held there. Arrangements are in progress for appointing staff to develop the collection and provide services to planners and policy-makers.

Trinidad and Tobago

The Library of the Ministry of Finance is the location of the national focal point for the Caribbean Information System. Several libraries within the socio-economic sector are contributing to the system. It is expected that the increase of professional staff in the Ministry will facilitate further co-ordination activities by the library of the Ministry of Finance serving as focal point.

Bahamas, Belize, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, St. Vincent

These countries were not represented at the workshop for library and information personnel, and will therefore be included in the second phase of the project.

PROBLEMS AND PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT
AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Human Resources

The unavailability of suitably qualified personnel has been a major obstacle in the development of national information centres which would provide service to planners and serve as the focal point for the Caribbean Information System. Some of the factors contributing to this situation are:

- a) lack of trained personnel;
- b) personnel requiring upgrading and updating of their qualifications;
- c) no positions in the establishment of the Ministry for library and information personnel;
- d) delays in creating or upgrading positions;
- e) delays in appointments; and
- f) administrative unawareness of the value of information skills.

It has been recommended to governments that the person required to establish and manage the information centre be considered not only as one who hands out documents but as one who is able to understand and appreciate the information needs of users, and at the same time recognize appropriate and relevant information.

According to our present pattern of education, the position would require an information science professional with a background in the social sciences. It is recognized that such a candidate might not be readily available for appointment, and while it will be necessary in some cases to appoint an officer without these qualifications, it is recommended that plans be made to train a suitable candidate at one of the universities in the region which offers such courses.

Continuing Education. In cases where professionals exist, there is also a need for continuing education programmes to orient them to the development of specialized information services utilizing modern methods of information processing, storage and dissemination.

During the second phase of the development of the system, two workshops in modern techniques are planned for personnel managing the national centres, provided funding is approved. The first is expected to be funded by the IDRC of Canada and the second partly by the UNESCO Pilot Project for the Caribbean.

Physical Facilities

In many instances physical facilities have been inadequate. Alternative arrangements are possible, and in planning for development of the national planning agency consideration should be given to the provision of adequate space for the library and information centre.

Budgets

Budgetary provision has been inadequate in most instances. Considering the value of information, larger budgets should be provided. Aid possibilities should also be sought.

Financial Assistance

Governments are also urged to seek funding for the national centres from the various national and international agencies known to have shown interest in the area of providing national infrastructure for information centres in the socio-economic field.

The IDRC has provided assistance for the Caribbean Documentation Centre and has indicated its willingness to promote national information infrastructure, and in some cases has already agreed to provide financial assistance for national infrastructure and for training of personnel. The CDC will assist in the preparation of project proposals, if required to do so.

Access to Information

This has also presented some difficulty in a few of the countries and the declassification of studies and reports prepared for governments would facilitate access by other regional governments and even by some officers in the country itself.

Products of the System

The Caribbean Documentation Centre, working on the premise that control of documents produced at the institutional level is a rational approach to total coverage of documents for the System, has indexed and abstracted all documents produced by or for ECLA's Office for the Caribbean.

The product of this exercise has recently appeared as the first issue of CARISPLAN Abstracts. The second and future issues will contain inputs from all participating institutions, including those of the Caribbean Documentation Centre. CARISPLAN Abstracts help the user to identify existing documentation and to appraise the value of the available literature, its relevance to his area of interest and to determine his need for the original document.

The CDC also publishes a bi-monthly current awareness bulletin to inform the user of recent publications in areas which have been determined by the CDCC as priority for regional development. This information could be disseminated on a weekly basis if the Secretariat had its own computer.

The absence of computer facilities at the CDC has been an obstacle in the development of the System. In order to provide in the short term a genuine information service to planners and decision-makers, ECLA's Caribbean Documentation Centre urgently needs computer facilities which will enable it to provide more rapid access to the information stored in the Caribbean data base which is created and housed in CEPAL, Santiago. Such facilities would also enable the CDC to acquire and search the data bases of international organizations and disseminate this information to planners in the region thereby avoiding high telecommunication costs.

