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Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation  
ECLAC/CLADES

INFOLAC: TWENTY QUESTIONS  
AND A STRATEGY FOR 1988-1990

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INFOLAC is the Regional Program to Strengthen Co-operation among National Information Networks and Systems for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Its main purpose is to serve as a forum for the concerted action of the different countries for analyzing the various problems relating to the information sector in the region and seeking common solutions.

INFOLAC activities are oriented at contributing to the strengthening of the individual and joint autonomy of national institutions in: a) creating and managing mechanisms of organization and access to the information resources and b) permitting a greater use of these resources in the preparation, execution, evaluation and management of development plans, programmes and policies.

It was officially established in 1986 through an agreement of the national and regional institutions that participated in the INFOLAC Constitutive Meeting, held in Santiago, Chile, at ECLAC headquarters. It is sponsored by three international institutions: the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), through the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation; the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Department of Scientific Affairs, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), through the General Information Programme. INFOLAC has different participatory organs. They include a Technical Secretariat, which is comprised of representatives from each of the sponsoring institutions, and other national and regional mechanisms of participation, made up of institutions and specialists from Latin American countries.

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Presentation .....	5
 <b>Twenty questions (ECLAC/CLADES)</b>	
Prologue .....	9
1. ¿What does the word INFOLAC mean? .....	11
2. ¿What objective does INFOLAC pursue? .....	11
3. ¿Is there a "sector" of information resources and services of Latin America and the Caribbean, that is, a specific target for INFOLAC? .....	11
4. ¿What problems affect the information resources and services of the region? .....	14
5. ¿What benefits are supplied by a multilateral approach to the problems that affect information resources in the region? .....	15
6. ¿How was INFOLAC created? .....	16
7. ¿What policies define the content of INFOLAC? ..	18
8. ¿What institutions and professionals may participate in INFOLAC and how? .....	18
9. ¿What is understood by concerted action in INFOLAC? .....	19
10. ¿How will INFOLAC be organized, and for what purposes? .....	19
11. ¿How does INFOLAC work as a mechanism for concerted action and exchange of experience? ...	20
12. ¿What special role is assigned to Latin American experts in INFOLAC? .....	22
13. ¿Is INFOLAC a programme or a fund? .....	23
14. ¿How is INFOLAC funded? .....	24
15. ¿Is INFOLAC a new co-operative network of information? .....	25
16. ¿Is INFOLAC an information system for information activities? .....	26

	<u>Page</u>
17. ¿What kind of national information project is of interest to INFOLAC and how is it managed? .....	26
18. ¿What does INFOLAC consider a regional project, and how is it managed? .....	28
19. ¿What role does the Technical Secretariat play in relation to INFOLAC projects? .....	28
20. ¿Where can more information be found about INFOLAC? .....	29
Notes .....	30

**INFOLAC Strategy 1988-1990, (Second Consultative Meeting on INFOLAC. Caracas, Venezuela, 1988)**

1. Objectives of the strategy .....	33
2. Criteria for designing a work plan .....	33
3. Proposed activities 1988-1990 .....	33
a. National information policies .....	34
b. Human resource development .....	34
c. Exchange formats .....	36
d. Union catalogue of serial publications in the region .....	37
e. Telecommunications .....	38
f. Microisis .....	38
g. Promoting the use of information .....	38
h. Promotion and animation of INFOLAC .....	39



## PRESENTATION

This publication is basically informative. It intends to provide background data on the concept of INFOLAC, the current state of this concept and the lines foreseen for its future development.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are submerged in a far-reaching process of change, which is particularly accelerated and dramatic in the information sectors of their respective societies. Here is where information resources, whether referral or full text databases are developed; here is where information products and services are generated and distributed, new information methodologies and technologies are introduced and improved, and qualified human resources are trained to carry out those tasks. This entire work seeks to support, through the best information available, the process of decision-making and problem-solving concerning economic and social development.

This dizzying process of change offers many opportunities to countries of the region to abridge distances with the industrialized world and to overcome complex stages, adopting more effective and efficient ways to manage information resources and developing the respective support mechanisms in the spheres of technology, methodology and new professional qualifications. Paradoxically, though, it poses serious threats and risks in terms of an atomization of decisions, lack of inter-institutional co-operation and absence of overall views, all of which may lead to new forms of stagnation.

INFOLAC emerges from the countries themselves, as a search for the adequate mechanisms to find answers to these challenges. Neither INFOLAC nor any other regional co-operation organism guarantees a future world without mistakes or possible setbacks. Nonetheless, its nature as a space open to dialogue makes it appear to be a concrete possibility for participation and the exchange of experiences that facilitates better learning and favors greater potential use of our own capabilities as countries of the South.

This document gathers two contributions considered to be of interest for stimulating thought and possibly inspiring future regional co-operation activities. The first document has been prepared by ECLAC/CLADES in its capacity as a member of the Technical Secretariat and corresponds to a view of INFOLAC outlined from the regional perspective of ECLAC, a United Nations organism concerned with formulating thinking and promoting basic consensus on the development phenomena of the countries of Latin America.

The second contribution presents lines and concrete actions suggested for INFOLAC for the biennium 1988-1990. They come from national experts who participated in a recent advisory meeting organized by UNESCO/PGI in Caracas in November 1988.

ECLAC has prepared the present publication as a contribution to the work of INFOLAC, in particular, and regional co-operation, in general.

The organization trust that access to these texts will help to clarify the role and space corresponding to INFOLAC. It also hope to stimulate a debate in the region that will lead to critiques, comments and suggestions that will help to make INFOLAC work more effective.

Santiago, Chile, August 1989

INFOLAC  
Twenty questions \*

\* Document prepared by ECLAC/CLADES as member of INFOLAC Technical Secretariat.

## PROLOGUE

Nearly two years after the November 1986 regional meeting in Santiago, Chile, where the activities for establishing INFOLAC in Latin America and the Caribbean were officially launched, it was deemed necessary to take time to reflect upon what had been done and what was yet to do.

That reflection gave rise to these notes, whose only purposes are to re-examine the very concepts and principles that gave birth to INFOLAC, define more clearly its nature as a co-operation mechanism and permit a better insertion and participation in it of the institutions of the region, which are definitively the actors and beneficiaries of this work.

The notes have been structured on the basis of questions that have been directed time and again at the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat during its missions throughout the region. Such questions come from different institutions and the distinct levels within them and are a reflection of the many concerns of those participating or wishing to participate in INFOLAC. This fact gives rise to a large variety of perspectives and viewpoints that necessarily expand and enrich the area of their interests. Since these are real questions, the answers attempted here are possible approaches; therefore, they are not presented as absolute truths, but as ideas in pursuit of improvement and consensus through discussion and dialogue.

The document is set up in the form of questions and answers, numbered from one to twenty. In order to facilitate its reading, it is suggested to group the questions according to possible interested parties.

Institutional authorities and those specialists interested in the theoretical concept of INFOLAC and its insertion in development problems will be able to find useful material in questions 1 to 6.

Those individuals in charge of national information systems, coordinators of information networks and projects probably would be interested in examining questions 7 to 16.

Finally, the specialists that manage information units or work in them will want to know about the possibilities for introducing changes in their services or resources, and what specific help INFOLAC offers for elaborating projects or obtaining funds. These people will most likely direct their attention to questions 17 to 20.

Through the preparation of these notes, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has wished to contribute to a better functioning of the mechanisms and

organisms of INFOLAC, thus reaffirming before the institutions of the region its interest in the progress of this endeavour, essentially linked to one of the main functions of the Commission, that of generating and exchanging information on development.

1. ¿What does the word INFOLAC mean?

INFOLAC is the term assigned to:

Regional Program to Strengthen Co-operation among National Information Networks and Systems for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. ¿What objective does INFOLAC pursue?

The overall objective of the programme is:

"To strengthen the individual and joint autonomy of the national institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean in order to create and operate mechanisms of organization of and access to the information resource and intensify its use in the formulation, execution, evaluation and administration of their respective plans, programmes, policies and activities for economic, social, scientific, technological and cultural development."<sup>1</sup>/

What should be mentioned here is the magnitude of the objective, not only in the sense of geographic coverage, but also in the number and variety of institutions and areas to which information efforts are extended.

3. ¿Is there a "sector" of information resources and services of Latin America and the Caribbean, that is, a specific target for INFOLAC?

Information resources can be considered, in general, to be an entity made up of databases of different types and forms of operation. If a broad concept is adopted and any organized collection of texts with an informative content is considered to be a database, the following can be deemed to be databases: the data files registered in legible means by computer, whether pieces of text, numbers, images or sounds; organized document collections (newspaper, videocassette, and book libraries, etc.); and the interrelated series of computerized databases and document collections.

What is the purpose of organizing information resources?

Fundamentally, in order to meet a social need, perhaps less evident, but equally as real as nutrition, health, scientific development or housing. People, groups or institutions in charge of decision-making and activities promoting development will reach their goals more fully if they are opportunely provided information before, during and after their execution. That information may involve the objective and the way to execute the activity, with the possibility of alternative actions or with the potential repercussions of those actions.

In this context information is, in a broad sense, the entire group of signs (whether written text, numbers, images, sounds or combinations of these) capable of contributing some knowledge to actors responsible for development activities.

The mere fact that information has been organized in databases is in no way sufficient to ensure the success of development activities. An additional condition is that the databases be able to reach a level of organization in which they can produce and be capable of transforming basic information resources into suitable information products and services that are accessible to those responsible for development activities. It is necessary, moreover, that these actors be capable of using, interpreting, evaluating and comparing appropriately such information products and services.

The units producing information goods and services are organized differently. They may be an individual information unit that generates information products and services on the basis of one or more databases (computerized files and/or document collections), or groups of related information units that form true networks or systems of normalized information exchange.

The group made up of databases, units producing information goods and services and information systems and networks can be given the generic name of information infrastructures.

Moreover, if it is perceived that these infrastructures are a coherent whole, oriented at serving certain markets where information needs are manifested, the existence of an industry or, more broadly, the existence of an information sector can be affirmed.

The importance for the development of information infrastructures can hardly be exaggerated, whatever their degree of organization or internal coherence may be, if considering that they are, as it were, the "memory" and one of the determinant mechanisms of the society's "intelligence."

The problem-solving of a society is facilitated enormously if it has access to information resources that help us understand the past and present and prepare for future activities. It is difficult to conceive, in fact, that empirical science, technology and the praxis of a society can progress if it lacks the ability to generate, organize, exploit and use information resources.

Until now, the Latin American and Caribbean region has been, barring exceptions, practically impermeable to the information sector concept.

One of the factors that handicaps the perception of the sector has been the historical evolution of information resources, units and information networks, which have taken form and developed anarchically and dispersely, without abiding by policies or broad guidelines. This generalized dispersion not only makes it difficult to perceive the distinct databases individually, but also stands in the way of viewing them as a whole. Thus, there is a tendency to isolate and treat the different types of databases (statistical, biographical, referral) as watertight compartments: the absence of a framework that brings them together makes it nearly impossible to establish connections among diverse databases that are indispensable when

attempting to gather and prepare complex information products by matter or by subject.

Another obstacle in viewing the information sector has been the confusion between information resources and the technologies that can make their management more effective and efficient. Thus, it is frequently forgotten to assign information resources a value of their own, a value that is independent of the technologies that facilitate their management and access.<sup>2/</sup>

Finally, a third impediment has been caused by the almost total absence of professionals with thorough training, capable of seeing the phenomenon of information in its entirety and of working in association with the other disciplines necessary for an adequate selection, intellectual treatment, storage, conservation, computer processing, consultation and transmission of information to remote places.

The consequences of this insufficient perception have been many. Naming only two of them will suffice.

The first consequence deals with the difference in the capacity to act between, on the one hand, the experimental research and development firms and institutions in highly industrialized countries and, on the other, counterpart entities in the countries of the region. This gap comes from, among other factors, a contrasting managerial concept and a distinct capacity to manage information resources that has prevailed in industrialized countries.

To illustrate these ideas, it is enough to indicate that information resources, whether of public or private domain, have been determinant in the competitiveness, expansion and survival of the major transnational corporations of the industrialized countries and that the creation of the "department of information resources" was one of the important organizational innovations in achieving those results. This contrasts with the situation prevailing in Latin America and the Caribbean, where, with the exception of some large-size public enterprises and some top-ranking universities, information resources are weak, are not organized with an industrial approach, that is, centered on information products and services and their markets, and where the capacity of use of existing information resources is still scant.

A second consequence of the difficulties in perceiving the existence of the information sector is the fact that topics relating to information resources and services barely appear on the national development agendas of the countries of the region. Rarely has information been treated as a national problem nor has it been examined as an economic resource that, like water, energy or natural resources, has a value, is traded on markets and poses options in terms of its development.

On the contrary, when it has been treated, the subject has always appeared as an accessory to other problems, for example, technological development or efficient management of the State, and above all, under the perspective of the technologies that manage the information resource, when discussions on



microelectronics, telecommunications or the software industry have taken place.

This contrasts with the situation prevailing in developed countries like Japan, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, etc., where, under the inspiration of the pioneer works of Machlup and Porat, the information industry is studied by itself and policies are designed for its development.

The awareness of the information sector and the problems that inhibit its contribution to development are the *raison d'être* of INFOLAC, taking into account the little perception and understanding of its nature as a real sector of the economy and society. Moreover, sensitizing the region to the importance of the information sector will have to be a foremost concern for INFOLAC.

4. What problems affect the information resources and services of the region?

The inability to perceive the existence of the sector comprised of information services and resources has caused and/or intensified many problems in the institutions serving a branch of economic activity or a country as a whole.

Of these, the following should be noted, for example:

- \* Little use of existing information resources, whose establishment has normally required considerable investments.
- \* Incompatibility of information resources and difficulties in integrating them, circumstances that impede to increase the potential of existing efforts, demand unnecessary work to make them compatible and hinder the provision of broad and complex answers by information systems.
- \* Unawareness of information resources (in terms of their existence, contents, access conditions, etc.) and the infrastructures generating information products and services.
- \* Constant deterioration of many information services and resources, which directly derives from insufficient, erratic and unpredictable budgets assigned to them, due to the lack of perception or the underestimation of the benefits involved in their use.
- \* Partial or inadequate use of existing information technologies, whereby access to those resources is hindered or their use is made less promising.
- \* Insufficient supply of qualified human resources to assume the many tasks required by the generation and exploitation of information resources.

- \* Difficulties in transmitting publicly-owned scientific-technological information from one country to another and within each country.
- \* Unequal exchange in the trade of information resources between institutions of the developed world and those of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- \* Frequent lack of coherence between, on the one hand, policies on computerized information processing and telecommunications, the training of specialized teams in information, the promotion of the editorial industry, international data flows, development of microelectronic capital goods industries, and, on the other, policies on the development of information resources and access to them, harmonization that is indispensable for satisfying pressing demands regarding the design or execution of development activities.

These are complex problems, because their dimension and impact have not been duly studied and because the integral solutions, existing or in a stage of experimentation in other regions, have practically not been analyzed in our region.

Also, a highly generalized problem is the absence of forums for examining information infrastructures in compliance with an integrating approach that goes beyond more or less conventional divisions between statistical and bibliographical information, between the generation and management of databases and the management of information technologies.

Furthermore, many authorities and specialists interested in the problem of information are not sure where and with whom they can discuss these challenges.

5. ¿What benefits are supplied by a multilateral approach to the problems that affect information resources in the region?

Undoubtedly, in all the countries of the region an attempt has been made, with greater or lesser intensity, to elaborate and implement some solutions to the problems mentioned. But, what is typical of those solutions has been, barring rare exceptions, that they have not confronted the problems through joint efforts.

The isolation in which the institutions of each country have tended to work and the frequent lack of communication among technical and financial co-operation organisms have been mutually reinforced, thus creating favorable ground for the proliferation of small specific information projects, not interrelated, closed within themselves and, therefore, little able to stimulate to other institutions. This situation also has contributed to creating islands of information resources within countries or institutions, to suppressing the diffusion of innovations in the use of new technologies and methods even within the same institution, and to forming databases that cannot communicate among themselves.

In the information projects that have been carried out, not only has sharing resources been infrequent, but also effective mechanisms have not been established for exchanging experiences among the institutions, mechanisms that would permit saving resources and taking the maximum advantage of local technical knowledge.

The many common problems that affect the development and impact of information resources demand, due to their complexity and magnitude, that joint solutions be sought through concerted efforts. However, perhaps partly due to the persistence of an individualistic institutional attitude, those concerted efforts have almost never materialized and the institutions continue to work in isolation.

The importance of the existing problems is combined with a lack of response to questions such as:

- \* ¿are self-produced databases profitable or is it preferable to acquire them from outside the organization or sector involved?
- \* ¿what perspectives are offered by the exchange of information resources with other institutions?
- \* ¿are the users of an institution aware of and do they use the existing information resources?
- \* ¿can the information resources of each institution be integrated and are they accessible?
- \* ¿what technological options are the most advantageous for exchanging information resources (printed material, diskettes, CD-ROM, telecommunications, etc.)?
- \* ¿what human resources are required to generate, manage and exploit information resources?

6. ¿How was INFOLAC created?

INFOLAC arose as a response to the mounting accumulation of concerns and desires expressed by a number of institutions in different national and regional forums in the decade of the seventies. Of the national forums, those organized by national science and technology councils of the countries of Latin America are outstanding due to their effort to establish national scientific and technological information systems. The regional forums that stand out are those sponsored by non-governmental professional organisms, such as the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and those promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ECLAC, the Organization of American States (OAS), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), etc.

There, ideas are refined and acquire clarity and coherence about the need for: a national and regional joining of efforts;

harmonization of general policies that affect the development of information infrastructures; improved exploitation of the opportunities offered by co-operative efforts; and a reconciling of the different programmes promoted by multinational and international agencies that serve as a vehicle of expression for national aspirations.

In our region, moving from ideas to action required an initial catalytic effect, carried out, in this case, by the General Information Programme (PGI) of UNESCO, in its capacity as a world organization in the area of education, science and culture and the promoter of the Intergovernmental Programme for Co-operation in the Field of Scientific and Technological Information (UNISIST), the worldwide framework for information infrastructure compatibility.

In this stage, the regionalization of the Seventh UNESCO Programme, "Information Systems and Access to Knowledge," and the methodological proposal for preparing a wide-range regional project ("umbrella project"), financed with funds channeled through UNESCO, and set up within the principles of UNISIST, were the central ideas that gave an initial momentum to the launching of INFOLAC. Similar efforts undertaken by UNESCO in other geographical areas, such as the Regional Network for the Exchange of Information and Experience in Science and Technology in Asia and the Pacific (ASTINFO) and the Caribbean Science and Technology Information Network (CARSTIN) were taken as a background.

These ideas were discussed in successive regional meetings in Latin America and the Caribbean and were presented later as a concrete proposal at a meeting of experts held in 1982 by the General Information Programme (PGI) in Caracas. At that time, the experts recommended that UNESCO implement a regional effort like the one suggested and for that purpose a commission made up of a limited number of regional institutions with headquarters in Latin America, was created to explore different ways for implementing an effort of that magnitude, taking into account the particular characteristics of the region. At that time, the program was also coined with the term, INFOLAC.

ECLAC was fully incorporated into INFOLAC from that moment. By that time, the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CLADES), a Division of ECLAC, had relevant experience with respect to the diagnosis and development of the information infrastructures in the region and their articulation with national information systems. Also important was the intersectoral compatibility of documentary information systems promoted by the Planning Information System in Latin America and the Caribbean (INFOPLAN).3/

ECLAC finds in the operational flexibility of INFOLAC a modus operandi similar to its own work style, which puts emphasis on concerted actions as a way of approaching the problems that interest the countries of the region. Thus, during the entire period of previous studies and consultations with the institutions of the region, ECLAC/CLADES shared with UNESCO/PGI the methodological efforts for systematically gathering and organizing ideas, suggestions, preferences and national aspirations.

This preparatory period lasted nearly five years and was substantially longer than the one undertaken by UNESCO for the launching of ASTINFO or CARSTIN. However, this fact allowed the maturation, filtering, assimilation and adaptation of the idea of INFOLAC, and the emergence of regionally-produced concepts that give INFOLAC a personality of its own, akin but different to that of its peers in other regions.

7. What policies define the content of INFOLAC?

The content of the actions that can be undertaken through INFOLAC fall within areas and lines of actions of common interest for the countries.

The areas of interest were defined in the successive consultations that UNESCO and ECLAC made in the region and are the reflection of the priorities and perceptions existing in the 1982-1986 period.

Whether involving an exchange of experiences, research efforts or development projects, INFOLAC activities fall into the following areas:

- i) Management of information projects and programmes
- ii) Evaluation of modern information technologies
- iii) Compatibility, systematization and interconnection of databases
- iv) Promotion of the use of information resources and services
- v) Development of human resources specialized in information work
- vi) Animation of INFOLAC

In the constitutive meeting of 1986, the content of those areas was enriched, and divided in several lines of action where regional efforts with the participation of several countries appeared promising.

Neither the areas nor the lines are unalterable guidelines for the progress of INFOLAC, and their review and update is expected whenever its regional and national mechanisms meet. They only perform the initial function of giving a general orientation and purpose to the programme.

8. What institutions and professionals may participate in INFOLAC and how?

INFOLAC is a space open to all institutions and professionals who wish to participate and work in association with it.

Consequently, INFOLAC does not favor any economic or social sector in which information resources could be used. Moreover, there is interest in problems related to the use, development and accessibility of those resources, problems that are, therefore, common to all sectors, although having different characteristics within each of them.



Neither does it favor or put conditions on the participation of any country in particular. It is open on an equal basis to all countries ranging from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego.

Moreover, INFOLAC does not discriminate between public or private sector, between university or government sector. Any institution that needs or suggests the need to share experiences with other institutions will be welcomed.

Finally, INFOLAC does not align with any professional group involved in the management of information resources; its belief is that each profession has suitable mechanisms for safeguarding professional practice and forums for exchanging experiences from the viewpoint of a particular discipline. Nevertheless, INFOLAC can serve as a meeting point among different professionals, whose contributions are complementary in the field of information: documentalists, archivists, librarians and systems analysts, information systems managers and the users of those systems.

9. ¿What is understood by concerted action in INFOLAC?

The word that fundamentally summarizes the spirit of INFOLAC is that of concertation, a word that is considered almost opposite to co-ordination or subordination. To concert suggests the intention to harmonize the activities of several institutions that decide to freely associate without sacrificing their own missions and goals.

In addition, the idea of concertation assumes absolutely autonomous decisions by the associates as to who wishes to collaborate or exchange experiences, with whom, on what, when and under what conditions.

The reinforcement of concertation only demands that the institutions are alert to the possibilities of collaboration that arise in the region and are permanently ready to provide information on those possibilities to other potentially interested institutions. Moreover, the institutional contribution will increase as alternatives are devised for financing meetings among specialists and joint projects, and the responsibility is assumed for putting the parties together in order to make the exchange of experiences more lively and productive.

10. ¿How will INFOLAC be organized, and for what purposes?

During the design and consultation phase of INFOLAC there was a unanimous feeling that, if a new mechanism has to be created, it should be an adaptable, flexible instrument that would be alert and able to respond to the new needs that might arise in the region, and not just another bureaucratic organization or controller of initiatives, this time in the area of information resources.

Various alternative models were considered, ranging from hierarchical and pyramid-shaped models to more flexible ones. A flexible model was ultimately chosen, taking into account the

regional experience in concertation in other fields. Such experience includes some of the existing mechanisms for co-operation and integration in Latin America, which, unfortunately have become bogged down in the complicated legal, administrative and procedural structure imposed upon them from the beginning. On the positive side, however, there has been the experience of more innovative and flexible co-operation schemes, which have managed to achieve a more streamlined, more economical and more flexible operation, such as the Programme of Joint Studies on the International Relations of Latin America (RIAL), an initiative funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and ECLAC, and the Caribbean Network for Educational Innovations for Development (CARNEID), a project sponsored by UNESCO.

The national and regional institutions participating in the constitutive meeting of INFOLAC (held in November 1986 at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago, Chile) agreed on the following components and functions of the concertation mechanism:

- i) National groups of INFOLAC, responsible for promoting concertation within each country and for channelling relations with institutions of other countries.
- ii) Advisory groups, composed of regional specialists and convened temporarily where appropriate, to support the work of the Regional Co-ordination Committee and the Technical Secretariat.
- iii) A Regional Co-ordination Committee, open to the participation of any national or regional institution that shares the principles of INFOLAC, which will meet regularly to assess and formulate INFOLAC policies.
- iv) A Technical Secretariat, responsible for stimulating the development of INFOLAC.

The institutions represented at the meeting requested ECLAC and UNESCO to continue working in the INFOLAC Secretariat as in the previous phase, and proposed the incorporation of the Organization of American States, through its Department of Scientific and Technological Affairs, into the Technical Secretariat.

The institutions comprising the Technical Secretariat have already held a number of tripartite meetings to share their views and come to some basic agreements on their joint operations in the region.

11. How does INFOLAC work as a mechanism for concertation and exchange of experience?

The components which make it possible for institutions to participate in INFOLAC will seek to maintain permanent mutual relationships. These relationships will not, however, fit a rigid pattern, and will in large part be implemented in accordance with the initiative and interest shown by individual institutions or groups of institutions.

The most important relationships, as discussed below, include a wide range of possibilities which should be explored and used.

For the purpose of organizing the way these relationships are dealt with, we have divided them according to the levels on which they are established: i) national level, ii) horizontal relationships between countries, iii) regional level and iv) interactions between national and regional bodies.

What distinguishes these relationships is that the institutions in question, whatever the role they have decided to assume, will have complete freedom to take the initiative and establish and put into practice whatever link or connection they feel is appropriate, within the framework, of course, of the areas in which INFOLAC is interested.

Spontaneity will be the underlying basis for establishing the relationships, as well as the absence of any mechanism that would control, by decision or approval, the implementation of these relationships.

Accordingly, the Secretariat will take on the task of promoting relationships and contacts between institutions by sending timely messages concerning any opportunities for co-operation which may have arisen. However, each institution will naturally make its own decisions about whether or not to implement a given relationship.

i) At the national level, relationships will occur between "national liaison mechanisms" and "institutions headquartered in the country", acting within the INFOLAC national participation mechanisms.

The "national liaison mechanism" may take the form of an institution recognized by all or most of the others as having a convening capability and experience which enable it to promote concerted efforts in the information sector within the country. An equally valid possibility would be a national liaison mechanism made up of two or more institutions desiring to share these functions in some way.

Institutions headquartered in a country may form part of various action mechanisms, either by participating in discussion groups by thematic areas, by submitting or carrying out projects of interest to INFOLAC or by joining the so-called national committees, where all the institutions participating in INFOLAC, whatever their role or situation, would meet together.

It is hoped that the operation of these forms of participation in the countries will be guided by the national liaison mechanisms, according to the methodology and style best suited to the inter-institutional relationships of each country. Moreover, it will be part of the responsibility of the national committees or groups to ask for specific support from the Technical Secretariat to promote the work they have decided to undertake.

ii) Bilateral or multilateral relationships established between institutions headquartered in two or more countries, will



also be spontaneous. Broader opportunities will thus be made available to connect projects and exchange information between thematic groups or national liaison mechanisms existing in the countries involved.

iii) At the regional level, moreover, relationships may be established between the INFOLAC advisory groups, the Regional Co-ordination Committee and the Technical Secretariat. The Secretariat will play an important role here in forming and convening the advisory groups, following the suggestions of the Co-ordination Committee.

iv) Lastly, the relationships between the national components and their counterparts at the regional level would be of vital importance.

One of possible relationships having greater potential would be that established directly between the latin american and Caribbean specialists participating as advisors in the specialized regional groups advisory centered on specific areas or themes, on the one hand, and the national specialists on the other. These relationships would engender a network among professionals to interchange information on common problems and interests. Such contacts could foster innovations and new working methods.

The operation of INFOLAC thus offers a wealth of opportunities, many of them unexpected, for creative participation. Furthermore, it offers spaces which are complementary to those defined by the conventional regional and worldwide mechanisms, in which concertation between governments, related institutions and professionals in the same information discipline are being sought. It is moreover, possible, that participation in INFOLAC will generate new areas and forms of dialogue which may in turn enrich institutional participation in currently existing government forums, inter-institutional entities and professional groups.

12. What special role is assigned to Latin American experts in INFOLAC?

INFOLAC is interested in strengthening the flows of resources, information and knowledge between institutions, rather than promoting the development of isolated institutions.

In this context, it feels that technical know-how about the various problems and aspects of information resources and services should be disseminated to all the institutions in the region, regardless of their level of expertise or experience. All institutions, even though their resources may be scarce or they may have been established only recently, will always have something to demonstrate or teach to other institutions.

Accordingly, the Latin American and Caribbean experts working in the various information sciences and disciplines are considered to be major providers of the experience and technical know-how needed by regional and national projects.

This does not mean that the region is self-sufficient in terms of knowledge; in many areas where the Latin American and Caribbean countries are deficient, such knowledge will continue to be provided by the countries of the North, and possibly by other countries of the South. It only means that, in comparable conditions, INFOLAC will, as a policy, give preference to the participation of Latin American and Caribbean experts as providers of technical know-how in the various information areas.

This preference is based on the plausible assumption that Latin American and Caribbean experts have a wealth of experience that makes it easier for them to understand realities similar to their own, and on the hope that such participation will promote greater inter-institutional integration within and among the countries of the region.

This policy has been applied when the currently functioning regional advisory groups were established (development of human resources, specialized in information work, format for the interchange of referral information), and it is expected to guide the promotion of any additional groups which may prove to be necessary.

### 13. ¿Is INFOLAC a programme or a fund?

Strictly speaking, a programme is a planned action, executed by one or more agencies, which has a fixed amount of centrally administered financing to carry out precise objectives within previously defined time periods. In that sense, INFOLAC is not a programme.

However, the fact that of being a sort of incubator of programmes and projects of regional interest will in time make it more of a metaprogramme, or a programme in a broader sense.

As it goes about fulfilling its purpose, INFOLAC's field of operations will include any actions which may prove to be necessary and are feasible, either because an interest has been expressed in conducting joint experiments or exchanging experience, or because its efforts have been well received by the relevant funding institutions.

It is hoped, for example, that the Technical Secretariat will be able to discover potential sources of funding and encourage interested institutions to request and administer these resources.

The work of INFOLAC, then, is expected to go on for a longer time than could a regional project, in which the funds obtained are spent once and for all.

Moreover, INFOLAC is not a fund and does not pretend to become one. Concentration of financial resources in a single bloc may run the risk of ossifying the programme and bogging it down bureaucratically.

The situation described does not prevent institutions participating in INFOLAC from undertaking to prepare regional

programmes to deal with specific priority problems, nor does it keep institutions which so desire from applying for funds and administering them to promote such projects, by means of an express request for technical support from the Secretariat. But the projects will in any case be administratively independent, and the responsibility for their execution will fall on the institutions receiving the technical and financial assistance.

This also implies that it is not the Technical Secretariat's responsibility to approve projects which would then become recipients of a fund supposedly administered by it.

#### 14. How is INFOLAC funded?

The funding needs of INFOLAC are of two types:

- \* funds needed for general activities involving promotion, concertation, exchange of experience and dissemination of information to and among the various components of INFOLAC;
- \* funds needed to carry out national and regional projects.

In addition, three sources of funding must be considered in order to meet these needs:

- \* intergovernmental organizations participating in INFOLAC;
- \* national organizations participating in INFOLAC;
- \* external financial institutions.

It can be seen already that these resources will have a different relative weight according to the need in question. Moreover, the proportionate weight of each category of needs will probably experiment variations over time.

The contribution of the intergovernmental organizations participating in INFOLAC has been essential thus far in the funding of the programme activities having a general character.

The most significant of these has been the support coming from UNESCO, by allocating to INFOLAC a substantial part of the PGI decentralized funds available for Latin America and the Caribbean; these funds are administered by the UNESCO Regional Co-ordination Office in Caracas. They have made it possible, inter alia, to hold regional consultations and technical meetings, to convene INFOLAC regional advisory groups, to hire experts, to finance horizontal co-operation experiments and to disseminate information.

Also significant has been ECLAC's contribution, which has included the co-operation of CLADES in the field work needed to promote INFOLAC, the development of information systems in support of the programme (such as data bases for contacts and information projects), the organization of regional meetings, technical advisory assistance in the formulation of information projects and the publication of documents and reports concerning INFOLAC. A significant element of ECLAC's participation, through CLADES, is that its technical staff have been making regular visits to countries of the region and have provided an itinerant promotion of INFOLAC.

All these contributions have been made from the already existing intergovernmental sources funding both UNESCO and ECLAC activities, and have not involved special donations from the countries or participating institutions.

The general activities of INFOLAC have also had the in-kind support of the institutions and specialists participating in the meetings held under the auspices of INFOLAC.4/

Little can be said at the moment about the financing of the projects, because few projects have been formally submitted thus far for the approval of the funding bodies. It is hoped, however, that in the near future the national institutions will be able to request funding for a substantial number of proposals imbued with the spirit of INFOLAC. The funds thus obtained, plus the national counterpart financial support, will probably mean that, in the case of the projects, the order of predominance of the sources will be modified, gradually bringing external funding to first place, national funding to second place and funding from intergovernmental organizations participating in the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat --which would continued to be essentially a catalyst-- to third place.

In order for this to happen, contributions from the international sources that have traditionally supported information projects in Latin America will certainly not be enough, nor will a reallocation of the national funds currently earmarked for information activities.

It will also be necessary to set in motion an active policy for obtaining new sources of international funding, for improving the Technical Secretariat monitoring services responsible for passing this information on to institutions interested in submitting proposals, and for promoting the establishment of new national funds or reallocating existing funds not yet linked to informational topics.

#### 15. ¿Is INFOLAC a new co-operative network of information?

INFOLAC is not an information network in the traditional sense of the term, which implies a political decision and will to gather information on a certain topic through centres headquartered in different countries, and establish appropriate mechanisms for the regular exchange of this information.

INFOLAC is a mechanism whose purpose is to exert a catalytic effect on the interrelationships between the existing information networks, or on those which have yet to be established. It cannot, however, create new networks or strengthen existing ones, which would necessarily imply giving preference to certain sectors of development, a position which would be incompatible with its principles.

In a broader sense, nevertheless, INFOLAC is working through a network formed by institutions and persons in favor of exchanges of all types which may be necessary for co-operative projects within the information networks.

16. Is INFOLAC an information system for information activities?

One of the approaches used by regional projects involved in INFOLAC activities is that of building an information system for information activities, as a support tool for their own management and for the management of the information sector in each country and in the region as a whole.

The national and regional mechanisms comprising INFOLAC, need to know what is happening in the region, where to direct the actions to be taken by the various institutions, what capacities exist, in what areas it will be possible to transfer experience or undertake co-operative efforts, etc.

The line of action of the regional projects to set up an information system for information activities has been primarily encouraged by UNESCO/PGI, which has made investments in the design of a manual for processing referral information, the creation of a prototype MICROISIS data base, and the test of the manual by national institutions. It has also organized regional meetings to discuss and revise the manual and to agree on actions concerning the design of the system and the terminology with which it will work.

The success of this project is of great importance to the advancement of INFOLAC, but it is in any case only one of the projects involved in the overall regional effort.

17. What kind of national information project is of interest to INFOLAC, and how is it managed?

Three different types of projects can be distinguished: information projects in general, national information projects and national information projects of interest to INFOLAC.

An information project is a planned effort to stimulate some desired change in the information infrastructures dealing with a given development sector.

This change may manifest itself in the form of:

- \* New information resources and new information products and services, or expansion or diversification of existing information, products or services.
- \* Innovations in market mechanisms, and promotion of information products and services.
- \* Improvements in the technical capabilities of the human resources involved in information-related operational or managerial activities.
- \* Innovations in information technologies for managing information resources.



\* Changes in the methods and techniques with which information resources and activities are administered or technologically processed.

A national information project is a project promoted by one or more institutions headquartered in a given country and whose field of application is one or more economic sectors, institutional areas or geographical regions of the country.

There are many bodies within each country which may initiate projects. Also, many different kinds of changes and a number of types of beneficiaries of these changes may be sought through the projects.

Lastly, a national information project of interest to INFOLAC is one which fulfills the following criteria or conditions:

The willingness to share  
Transferability  
Content relevant to an area of interest to INFOLAC

The first and most important condition is the willingness to share, which is shown in both the formulation and the execution of the project.

Sharing with others may imply varying degrees of commitment or institutional opening. These range from an institution's willingness to carry out joint projects with other institutions --in this case sharing human resources, equipment, information resources or buildings-- to more subtle but nonetheless effective forms, in which knowledge and experience arising out of the formulation and execution of the project are exchanged.

On the other hand, INFOLAC would not be interested in a project which would be initiated and completed within an institution as a water-tight compartment, imprisoned in the institutional framework, thereby preventing the experience and knowledge acquired there from being obtained by other institutions.

Naturally, the willingness to share may arise from an inter-institutional discussion in a seminar sponsored by INFOLAC, in meetings of the INFOLAC national committees or groups or the thematic subgroups, or as an initiative of one or more institutions meeting outside the mechanisms directly sponsored by INFOLAC.

The second condition is that the project should promote changes not only in the institution carrying it out but in other institutions as well. In other words, the knowledge and experience accumulated in the project must be transferable. Transferability will depend, among other things, on the innovative character --in the view of other institutions-- represented by the change proposed by the project, the appropriateness of the introduction of these changes for the recipient institution and the technical and political feasibility of making such a transfer. The transferability of a project will naturally differ from one country to another.

INFOLAC would therefore not consider as a project an effort to generate changes of interest to only one isolated institution which could not be applied outside it.

The third condition is that the project should correspond to the thematic priorities being established through the INFOLAC participation mechanisms.

The current areas and pursuits of INFOLAC were specified at its constitutive meeting in November 1986. These priorities are not static, and will probably be adjusted to the problems that present themselves to the region in the management of information resources.

18. What does INFOLAC consider a regional project, and how is it managed?

In general terms, regional information projects are those information projects promoted by one or more institutions headquartered in a country or in various countries, whose field of application is one or more economic sectors, institutional areas or geographical regions of at least two countries.

This definition includes bilateral projects within which horizontal technical co-operation projects represent sub-categories. The definition also covers projects multilateral projects which involve subregions or the region as a whole.

The same requirements for national projects --a willingness to share, transferability and substantive agreement with areas of interest to INFOLAC-- also apply to these projects. Their management, may, however, take advantage of a much broader range of possibilities. For example, the national consultation mechanisms through which INFOLAC operates may promote regional-level projects. These may also include truly regional mechanisms (such as the advisory groups or meetings sponsored by regional organizations of various types) within which one or more institutions may undertake projects involving the exchange of experience, or co-operative enterprises between institutions of different countries.

19. What role does the Technical Secretariat play in relation to INFOLAC projects?

The Secretariat essentially plays the role of liaison and promoter of opportunities for co-operation. The nature and intensity of this role will vary, depending on whether the information projects are national or regional.

For national projects, the Secretariat's role is seen as complementary and auxiliary to that of the liaison institutions which are responsible for the channels of communication between a national institutions and the Secretariat.

The national liaison body or bodies may promote discussion sessions, obtain or directly provide technical assistance for the preparation of the project, advise the institutions submitting the

project on how to find sources of funding, put these institutions in contact with other potentially interested national institutions, etc.

If the national liaison body is only partially able to take on these functions, the Technical Secretariat would play a subsidiary role, acting in such case as a compensation mechanism, as long as it is expressly requested to do so by the national body or bodies carrying out the liaison responsibilities. However, the Secretariat's contribution at the country level would primarily be that of reporting on the existence of similar initiatives in other countries of the region and the existing funding possibilities.

Regionally, the Secretariat will play a more active and executive role, which it may assume directly or delegate to experts or ad hoc mechanisms. One of the aspects of this function consists of convening regional discussion sessions on a project. Others include obtaining or providing technical assistance directly for formulating regional projects, helping the institutions submitting the project find sources of funding and putting these institutions in contact with other potentially interested national institutions.

To accomplish these tasks, it is of prime importance for the Secretariat to have information on ongoing projects, sources of funding, the existence of experts on various topics, and up-to-date directories of institutions. It will also be essential to have flexible telecommunication channels, in order to stay in permanent contact with the institutions participating in the national and regional components of INFOLAC. To achieve this purpose, a pilot project has been initiated on data transmission between the headquarters of ECLAC in Santiago, Chile, and UNESCO in Caracas.

## 20. Where can more information be found about INFOLAC?

INFOLAC is a young, developing mechanism. It operates within a broad area, in which it has been breaking new ground, and constantly seeking, through dialogue, to improve its concepts and forms of participation.

Because it is in its formative stage, its areas and contents are difficult to define in a clear cut way and in a manner that might limit their future development.

There are, however, documents in which the development of reflections about INFOLAC have been recorded, and which interested persons may consult.<sup>5/</sup> It should be noted that the dynamics of change in terms of new ideas and approaches emerging from experiences in various countries, have not been recorded and cannot be timely recorded in these documents.

The Technical Secretariat is another source of information, since it is a mechanism open and interested in maintaining contact with specialists and those responsible for information resources. However, it should be expected that given its tripartite nature information provided will be toned with the organizational hue and



culture of the institution with which a contact has been established.

We believe, however, that the best sources of information are the specialists themselves and those in charge of information resources and units in the national institutions which are participating in INFOLAC. Whatever their role in the programme, they will be best able to define their own experiences and to assess the degree with which INFOLAC has provided them with new channels and contacts and has facilitated their access to the information they need to resolve any problems which may arise with regard to generating, organizing and using information resources.

#### Notes

- 1/ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CLADES) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO/General Information Programme (PGI), Basic Principles for a Regional Program to Strengthen Co-operation among National Information Networks and Systems for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (INFOLAC) (LC/L.389), Santiago, Chile, June 1986, p. 15.
- 2/ Undoubtedly, modern information technologies add value to information resources. In fact, data or an idea that is accessible rapidly and cheaply and can be interrelated with other data and ideas is preferable to isolated information that takes a long time and is expensive to obtain. However, it is obvious that a statistical series or a scientific article also has a value per se, regardless of whether it is stored on diskette, on magnetic disk, printed on paper or is accessible on-line from a terminal connected by telecommunications to a computer network.
- 3/ Project financed since 1978 by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and set up within the framework of the Development Sciences Information System (DEVSIS).
- 4/ No contribution or support has yet been recorded from external financial institutions to meet the needs involved in directing and promoting INFOLAC.
- 5/ See ECLAC/CLADES and UNESCO/PGI, op. cit., and Informe final de la reunión sobre "Los lineamientos y puesta en marcha de un programa regional para el fortalecimiento de la cooperación entre redes y sistemas nacionales de información para el desarrollo en América Latina y el Caribe", (LC/L.406), Santiago, Chile, April 1987.

INFOLAC STRATEGY 1988-1990 \*

\* From the final report of the second consultative meeting of the Regional Programme to Strengthen Co-operation among National Information Networks and Systems for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Caracas, 10-14 October 1988.

**INFOLAC TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT**

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## INFOLAC STRATEGY 1988-1990

### 1. Objectives of the strategy

- a. To provide continuity to activities for strengthening co-operation among national and regional information systems, networks and services.
- b. To promote a tighter relationship between INFOLAC activities and the definition and implementation of national information policies.
- c. To improve managerial capacity in information services and systems in the region.
- d. To focus attention on the carrying out of activities contributing to a better understanding and application of information technology, leaving their use to the priorities and criteria of various countries of the region, arising from their respective development needs and strategies.
- e. To give priority to the formation of the human resources necessary for different levels including applicable information technologies.

### 2. Criteria for designing a work plan

- a. To develop activities in the countries for strengthening their information networks and systems, in harmony with any existing national policy. The work to be carried out would refer to other already developed by other countries in the region in an attempt to achieve effective regional integration.
- b. To use, in the countries of the region, the results of the presently defined projects (FCC, FIIR, Telecommunications, Union Catalogue) to adapt their application to particular needs. To also conceive new projects which can be carried out through regional concerted actions.
- c. To strengthen the relationship of the Technical Secretariat with the national liaison centres and with countries or territories still not incorporated in INFOLAC. This will require quick and fluid communication among the members of the Technical Secretariat and between the Secretariat and the national liaison centres and Authorities.
- d. To formulate project proposals only when their technical viability is assured and negotiations to guarantee sufficient resources (national and international) for financing them are well underway.

### 3. Proposed activities 1988-1990

As the result of the sessions various activities were identified which the participants considered important to carry out in the region. On this basis, the following

proposal was included as a framework in a medium term work plan in INFOLAC.

**a. NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICIES**

**a.1 Regional Seminars on Information Policies**

The countries which have not yet carried out national seminars on information policies and are interested in doing so will programme them during 1989-1990. The support of PGI of UNESCO is available for this as well as the experience of countries which have already carry out this type of activity.

**a.2 Regional Meeting**

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will negotiate the fund and programme, for the beginning of 1990, of a regional meeting for analysing and interchanging the experiences of the countries in national information policies in an attempt to harmonize and evaluate their regional implications.

**b. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

**b.1 Regional Plan**

During 1988-1990 the INFOLAC Advisory Group for human resources development whose formation has been proposed for this meeting, will carry out, with the INFOLAC participants, the approved programme, giving priority to the following activities of the regional plan.

**b.1.1** To define, improve, test and distribute a conceptual model for human resource development in information focussing on professional activities and education and organizational aspects for locating the individual specialist in a specific work environment.

**b.1.2** To design and developed a research project for identifying, at the national and regional level, the necessary and desirable lines of professionalization as perceived by a qualified sample of specialists.

**b.1.3** To design and develop a research project for identifying, at the national and regional level, the necessary and desirable information functions focussed on various work environments, as perceived by a qualified sample of specialists.

**b.1.4** To promote the design and development of a study on the present situation of library science and archive education offered in the countries of the region in order to identify

the strategies necessary for their optimization and modernization.

- b.1.5 To identify methodologies for elaborating and validating professional profiles and to establish, by a consensus of the Regional Advisory Group, the most appropriate for adoption (and adjusted where necessary) according to the needs of the region.
- b.1.6 To design and develop a project for elaborating and validating the professional profiles selected as a result of the research process undertaken in b.1.3.
- b.1.7 To broaden and adjust existing requirements for the design and organization of post-graduate educational programmes in the information area, so that they can be used in the development and evaluation of training and practice programmes.
- b.1.8 To prepare guides for organizing and evaluating teaching, training and up grading programmes for information.
- b.1.9 To promote the carrying out of a study for determining the possibility of designing and developing an integrated data base on human resources, materials, and information useful for supporting the design, organization, and evaluation of programmes for teaching and training human resources for information work.
- b.1.10 To support the development of a "basic support bibliography for the design and development of educational programmes in information".
- b.1.11 To promote the production and publication of key academic texts for the development of educational programmes established in the framework of the "Regional Plan for Fostering the Development of Human Resources in Information". (Annex 3).
- b.1.12 To promote the production and publication of material for distribution on the key topics and problems for promoting a regional information culture, information technology, and the impact of these on individual, national, and regional development.

## b.2 Needs

In 1989, the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will evaluate the needs for other specific courses or seminars in the region to collect the necessary financial support and programme them in 1989/1990.

It is estimated that between two and three courses per year will be necessary, considering the interest shown in themes such as: project preparation, systems and services administration, normalization, documentary language, and promoting and marketing of information.

#### **c. EXCHANGE FORMATS**

- c.1 Distribution of documents, instructions, software, and other instruments.

In 1988/1989 the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will take charge of assuring the availability of the necessary copies of the formats to be distributed during 1989 to the institutions requesting them through the national liaison mechanisms. In 1989, the national liaison centres will distribute the available formats in their respective countries.

- c.2 Teaching and training

The national centres which have developed interchange formats and have the necessary infrastructure will study, in the first half of 1989, with the help of the Technical Secretariat, the demand for courses and facilities for teaching and training required by the various INFOLAC participants. On this basis, and according to their possibilities and needs, they will programme the necessary sessions for 1989-1990. The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will negotiate the necessary financial resources.

- c.3 Testing and evaluating the exchange formats

In 1989 the national institutions will make tests and evaluations of the exchange formats and send the resulting suggestions and observations to the responsible institutions.

- c.4 Amplifying, broadening, and modernizing the formats

The institutions which have produced exchange formats will analyse the possibilities of amplifying, broadening, and modernizing them, taking advantage of the previous experience in the region and their own studies.

- c.5 Translation of the formats

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will co-ordinate the activities so that at the end of 1989 translations of the formats to the other languages commonly used in the region will be available.

#### d. UNION CATALOGUE OF SERIAL PUBLICATIONS IN THE REGION

##### d.1 Regional Union Catalogue

In 1989 the pilot project co-ordinated by IBICT (Brazil), with the participation of Argentina, Colombia and México, will be concluded and mechanisms will be defined for expanding this instrument to include other countries and increase the number of registered serials titles. It will also include an evaluation of the possibilities of its publication on compact disk.

##### d.2 Requirements and conditions of integration to the Regional Catalogue

In 1989, the countries which already have relevant capacities in managing union catalogues will evaluate the requirements and conditions for the integration of the countries so requesting to the regional union catalogue.

##### d.3 Design of new union catalogues

The countries which are in the initial stages of developing their national union catalogues will analyse the possibility of designing these to be compatible from the start with the regional catalogues. For this, common methodologies must be used for the development of catalogues.

##### d.4 Training Facilities

The countries already participating in the Regional Catalogue pilot project, in keeping with their abilities, will provide the remaining countries facilities for training, methodological documents, and seminars in 1989. The Technical Secretariat will help in the distribution of the manuals and other documents and negotiate the funds necessary for the training.

##### d.5 Follow-up meeting

At the end of 1989 or the beginning of 1990, a meeting should be held for the follow-up, evaluation, harmonization, and planning of activities related to the Regional Catalogue, including the mechanisms and guidelines for the interchange and obtaining of documents in the region. The Technical Secretariat will negotiate the funds necessary for this.

##### d.6 Pilot Seminar in the Caribbean

UNESCO will negotiate funds for organizing a pilot seminar to bring together Latin American experts with Caribbean specialists in union catalogues.



#### **e. TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

##### **e.1 Mail box**

In 1988, UNESCO will negotiate the funds necessary to provide a group of INFOLAC national liaison centres having the necessary infrastructure, with the equipment called "mail box" (specialized equipment for managing a private electronic mail service) so that they can be interconnected with this medium. The equipment should be installed in 1989.

##### **e.2 Mutual access and interchange of information banks**

The INFOLAC national liaison centres which are interested will best mutual access and interchange of information banks in 1988 and 1989. This includes the development of tests for access to heterogenous data banks and the working out of specific bilateral or multilateral agreements.

##### **e.3 Use of the electronic mail system**

In 1988 experiments will continue on the use of the electronic mail system for which CONACYT (Mexico) will once again send the participants the corresponding instructions and passwords.

#### **f. MICROISIS**

##### **f.1 Use of the Microisis**

In 1988-1990, the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will programme and find support for three courses per year, of a regional character, for training teachers in the use of the Microisis.

##### **f.2 Courses and workshops**

The INFOLAC national centres will promote, in their respective countries, the courses and workshops required nationally for adequately using the Microisis.

#### **g. PROMOTING THE USE OF INFORMATION**

##### **g.1 Marketing of Information**

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will conclude its work on the design and contracting of the first course on information marketing at the beginning of 1989 and, depending on its results, will programme others in 1990 in different countries of the region.

## **h. PROMOTION AND ANIMATION OF INFOLAC**

### **h.1 Missions and joint studies**

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will continue its programme of missions and joint studies with national liaison mechanisms, particularly in the relatively less developed countries, emphasizing activities for promoting the participation in INFOLAC of those still not involved.

### **h.2 Negotiations for financial support**

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat will continue negotiations for financial support for projects and will join an information bank on financing sources, including requirements and procedures. The Secretariat will support the countries in handling administrative procedures.

### **h.3 Information banks**

The INFOLAC Technical Secretariat, with the national liaison mechanisms, will promote the collection and organization of information banks on relevant information projects being carried out within the INFOLAC framework and on regional specialists in information and institutions associated with the programme. These information banks should be incorporated to the system in the middle of 1989.

### **h.4 Statistical indicators**

In 1989, the INFOLAC Technical Secretariat, with the support of the national liaison mechanisms, will promote the definition and implementation of statistical indicators which provide better bases for programming and evaluating information activities in the countries of the region.

### **h.5 INFOLAC Bulletin**

The Technical Secretariat, with the support of the national liaison centres, will continue the fourmonthly publication of the INFOLAC Bulletin.