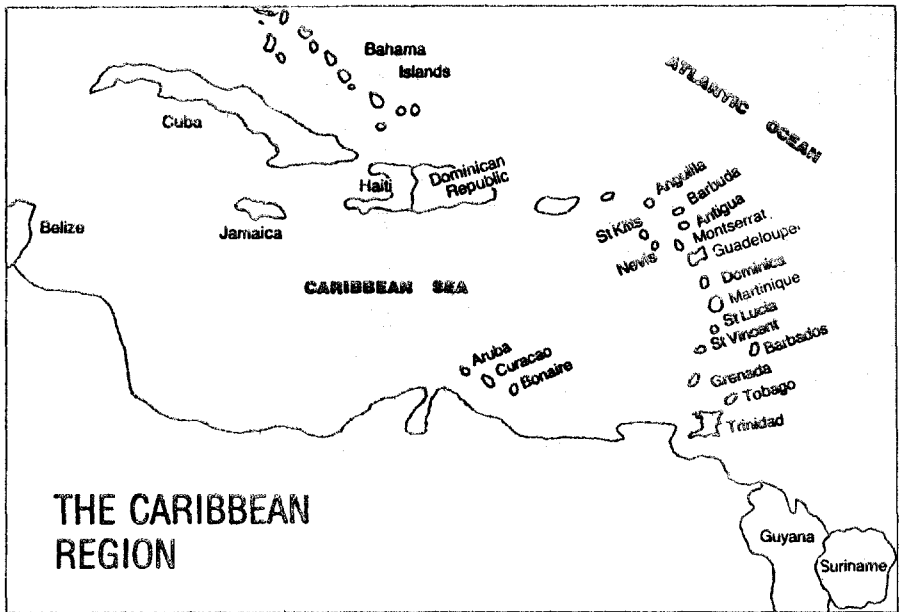Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee

THE CARIBBEAN REGION

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA
Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE

Workshop of User Education Techniques
for Use in Special Libraries
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USER EDUCATION FOR THE

CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM

Convened by the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee Secretariat (CDCC), U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America, Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean, under the sponsorship of the University of the West Indies Department of Library Studies and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

<u>User Education for the Caribbean Information System</u>

<u>- Some Appropriate Methods and Techniques</u>

The concept of user education and training defined in an earlier session, is the one within which this presentation is framed. The paper considers some programme alternatives, methods and techniques which are likely to create among existing and potential users of CARISPLAN a greater awareness of the value of information for socio-economic planning and de- velopment and instill in these users positive attitudes leading towards the need to seek and use information. Suitable programmes which could provide some of these target users with skills to discover and search relevant in- formation sources are outlined.

Assumptions

The paper assumes that the environmental situation has been care- fully studied, goals and objectives have been formulated, target audiences and their information needs identified, and that existing and potential in- formation and other support resources which may be necessary for programme implementation have been identified and ensured. Some programme alternatives may also have been examined and selected.

Annex I of this paper is a modified outline of a plan of action which is distributed by LOEX Clearing House [1]. It indicates steps to be considered in the planning and implementation stages and may be consulted when planning your exercise for presentation on Friday.

Promoting the Value of Information

One of the objectives of CARISPLAN is to assist member states of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee in developing an information

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[1]   LOEX Clearing House, Center of Education Resources, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, U.S.A.

service to meet the needs of the planning and development community. While some progress has been made in this respect, the level of development varies. It has become very clear to us that information infrastructure is a vicious circle. People only recognise the value of information after they have been provided with the right information at the right time.

If your library is deficient in resources, the first step should be to indicate to senior management personnel and professional staff the problems which they could experience if the existing information situation is not remedied. Case studies of national projects which have failed through lack of consultation of previous studies can be effectively cited.

The importance of preventing information produced within a country from being lost to the country itself should be stressed, indicating that the most valuable information needed for a country's development is usually the local information.

Another argument is the high investment made by Government and nationals in time and money in researching a topic and generating information or in having consultants prepare feasibility studies and reports. Emphasis could be on the duplication created at today's inflationary prices when these reports and studies are not organized for easy retrieval and subsequent use.

The importance of information as a negotiating tool could be mentioned. The shortcomings of the information system should also be outlined and measures to correct the situation recommended. Since information is produced at a very high cost, it is logical that a very small proportion of the cost be used to store, process and make it available for subsequent use within the country.

The benefits of information systems and services which provide timely, reliable and problem-oriented information in a convenient form could also be highlighted. Case studies on the roles of information personnel may be used to demonstrate that nations (e.g. Japan, Brazil) which have capabilities to generate, process, handle, transfer and use information have been able to make accelerated technological and economic progress.

CARISPLAN librarians could also promote the value of information by participating in seminars of professional societies or publishing articles in the journals of these societies.

Programmes and Methods to Motivate CARISPLAN Target Groups to seek and use Information

The theme discussed at the fourth UNISIST Meeting on the Planning and Implementation of National Activities in Science and Technology was "Information for Problem-Solving in Socio-economic Development". The experts of that meeting concluded that the difference between "information rich" and "information poor" is not a question of availability of information, but rather of the degree of utilization, and recommended that greater emphasis should be given to demand conditions rather than to supply aspects.

Development of CARISPLAN focal points and participating centres requires more than the acquisition of stocks of information. Of greater importance is that information - whether in-house or external, from formal or informal sources - is used by the target groups: senior management planners and researchers; advisory staff; divisional heads; administrative staff; working committees, and new staff.

If your in-house resources are weak, a description of other services which are available locally, regionally and internationally and of your referral services indicating who is doing what, where, how equipment or services may be obtained etc. can provide motovation. An introduction to your profiles of institutions and individuals and directories of information units can create an impression. The idea is to let the users know that in the absence of in-house conventional resources you, like them, are using informal sources and channels of communication except that you have developed structured and organised links to these formal and informal sources. Successful queries and responses may be used to demonstrate resource sharing. The relevance of information derived from the national environment when making decisions for the socio-economic development of the country may be emphasized. Here again, the importance of CARISPLAN Abstracts, the kinds of analysis done by you and your colleagues to facilitate the

planners' access to and use of information may be highlighted. The importance of using telex facilities to request relevant documents produced regionally and internationally can be emphasized.

Government officials could be reminded about the international information systems which they have successfully caused to be created. The philosophy and design principles of these systems were formulated in accordance with perceptions and arguments put forward by developing countries. There are about 120 different information systems operated by U.N. organisations and agencies. Analyses of their subject coverage indicate a heavy orientation towards areas for which information is needed by developing countries - agriculture, health, planning and development, industry, transfer of technology, the environment.

These systems are useful sources of information about other developing countries which may have conditions and circumstances similar to ours. FAO's AGRIS, UNIDO's Industrial Information System for managerial, economic and technological aspects of industrial development (INDIS) and its Industrial and Technical Information Bank (INTIB) which assists in the selection of appropriate technology at the planning stage, the Centre for Transnational Corporations at U.N. Headquarters, INFOTERRA are a few systems and services which were instituted in response to requests for action by developing countries and contact with them by CARISPLAN focal points and use of their service can be fruitful.

I think if we let our users know what exists elsewhere and demonstrate our ability to get information on time from these sources, this action could accelerate demand and eventually lead to additional resources to build the centre. It would also enhance our reputation and build confidence in the service.

Various studies have indicated that when a person receives information that is appropriate to the problem or task at hand and presented in a way that coincides with his/her level of available time, that person becomes more sensitive to the value and need for information. One study, the UNISIST Handbook on Consolidation of Information (UNESCO, Paris, 1982) lists, inter alia, the following fundamental requirements for information systems and services which serve policy-makers:

- more active involvement of the systems with user
  demand;

- tailoring the variety of information services/
  products to the variety of user levels and demands;

- enlarging the role of information specialists from
  information custodians to information intermediaries
  who provide guidance to users in formulating demands
  and queries, searching, relevance judgements and
  analysis;

- organizing information resources in ways that are
  more appropriate for socio-economic development and
  presenting them in pre-digested, problem-oriented
  forms.

The most effective method to motivate the potential user is to
tailor the user education programme to his needs. This involves a thorough
understanding of his needs and his information behaviour characteristics.
Within recent years studies have begun to appear on how social science in-
formation is used in the decision-making process. Three studies have been
identified which can help us to better understand these problems [2] [3] [4].

One of these studies, Project INISS, conducted by Sheffield Univer-
sity, has indicated that the needs of senior management personnel in the
Government Service are the most difficult to identify, perhaps because they
change so frequently. Emphasis seems to be on themes of current importance
and knowledge of what other government departments are doing in areas which

[2]   Wilson, T.D. + Streatfield, D.R. You can observe a lot... a study
of information use in local authority - social services departments con-
ducted by Project INISS. University of Sheffield Postgraduate School of
Librarianship and Information Science, 1980. (Occasional Publications
Series No. 12)

[3]   Caplan, Nathan et al. The use of social science knowledge in policy
decisions at the national level, a report to respondents. Ann Arbor, Uni-
versity of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1975. p.63 NTIS:PB244-759

[4]   Lazarsfeld, Paul et al. An introduction to applied sociology. New
York, Elsevier, 1975. p.196

affect them. The approach to user education for this category of user should perhaps be linked to the provision of a newspaper-clippings service and a current awareness service of developments in other departments. This level of staff also spends a considerable amount of time at meetings. These may be a useful avenue for promoting the use of information and determining needs and perhaps librarians should either participate in these more frequently, or have ready access to the minutes.

Planners, researchers and advisory staff may be more interested in subject-oriented material and factual data; for such target groups, description of available services and resources is likely to bear fruit.

Staff members appointed to Working Committees or Commissions of Enquiry should be approached at an early stage of their appointment and vital information sources brought to their attention.

A useful way to instill positive attitudes in new staff members is to introduce them to your index of expertise and sources of specialist information in the organization.

Skills-oriented training

Bibliographic instruction and orientation will be covered by other speakers later today; this section is therefore very brief.

The literature confirms that there is a positive relationship between the use of libraries and familiarity with the library's resources. It is essential therefore to follow-up our promotional work with user training programmes linked to their information needs, and based on current profiles. It is unlikely, however, that top decision-makers and senior management personnel will be involved in these programmes.

A simple description of the system used and services available is a necessary introduction. This may be followed by attempting to fill a simple query. If CARISPLAN Abstracts is used as the source, the query may be broken down into concepts, demonstrating how these concepts are then translated into indexing terms of the controlled vocabulary used. An explanation of the reason for a controlled vocabulary may follow, emphasizing

the need to ensure standardization and aid retrieval, by serving as a common language between the indexer and the user.

The user can then be shown the various approaches to finding material in CARISPLAN and an explanation given on the arrangement of the abstracting journal which was designed to cater for his needs.

The library should be adequately guided; this gives the user some assurance that, on return to the library, he will have visual aids to support his memory.

The introduction may be followed by distribution of a User's Guide to sources. The guide can fill a teaching role, for example, if it says to the user "this is the approach that should be used when investigating a problem in economics" and then gives examples. Some commercial indexing and abstracting firms provide printed guides to their services. These could be prominently displayed. As CARISPLAN develops, promotional material of this nature can be created by ECLA for distribution to participating centres.

Modified Outline Plan of Action

for Basic Library Instruction

To establish a Programme

1.   Consider the environment

      (a)   define setting: institutional nature, subject em-
             phasis, programmes, core courses, distribution re-
             quirements, size, resources;

      (b)   user population;

      (c)   assess library personnel/materials;

      (d)   discuss tentative ideas with management;

      (e)   assess library interests/needs of total community;

      (f)   determine initial target group and programme for-
             mat for maximum effectiveness;

      (g)   discuss proposed programme and organizational struc-
             ture with library staff and management; finalize
             plans.

2.   Plan the Library Instruction programme details

      (a)   write objectives for the programme methods;

      (b)   determine personnel/support staff needs and res-
             ponsibilities; needs for equipment/facilities/
             support services;

      (c)   list possible instructional materials to be prepared;

      (d)   prepare a tentative budget, identify financial con-
             straints;

      (e)   devise a projected timetable for implementation;

      (f)   design/plan evaluation methods/procedures.

<u>To implement a Programme</u>

1.   <u>Publicize the Programme to</u>:

    (a)   library staff;

    (b)   potential users/target groups.

2.   <u>Prepare instructional materials</u> to support teaching methods:

    (a)   printed guides, worksheets, evaluation forms, handouts, etc.

    (b)   media materials.

3.   <u>Test programme</u> on limited target portion of population.

4.   <u>Implement programme</u> fully:

    (a)   solicit support/involve library staff;

    (b)   keep detailed statistics;

    (c)   conduct periodic evaluation;

    (d)   write/revise annual objectives;

    (e)   continue to publicize the programme.

5.   <u>Remain flexible and patient</u>:

    (a)   revise;

    (b)   simplify;

    (c)   expand;

    (d)   keep up with the literature/attend courses.

6.   <u>Keep the programme working for six to ten years</u> - changing as user needs change.