

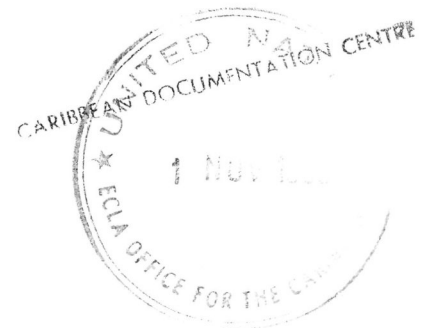


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 Subregional Office for the Caribbean
 CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE
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NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC NETWORK OF
 PLANNING INFORMATION UNITS

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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

1. - Therapeutic of the Caribbean Information System - Existing Situation and Problems Experienced

For all intents and purposes there is general consensus amongst the information seekers and users, as well as the information handlers community, that the Caribbean Information System (CIS), is undoubtedly of great value. However, the weight given to this value is confined to the knowledge and awareness particular groups have gleaned from formal or informal sources about the role, function and activities of the system. There is, therefore, a dire need to ensure that the general education and promotion programmes are conducted on a continuous basis, and efforts should always be directed towards ensuring that the entire target audience is reached. In addition, cognizance should be taken of the high and regular staff turn-over rate amongst each category of the beneficiaries; hence the necessity for repetition and duplication.

Ever since its establishment in 1979, the State Planning Secretariat Information Centre has been performing the dual role of attempting to satisfy the information needs of the Commission's staff; and on a more extended basis, within the wider Socio-Economic Planning Community, supplement the internal operations. In the case of the latter, this engagement is within reasonable limits dictated by the confines of the Commission's policies and objectives. Active participation and co-ordination of the Socio-Economic Network of Planning Information Units takes priority in this extended role.

The following activities and services assist in the endeavour to achieve the most effective results from the execution of these roles:-

- Selective Dissemination of Information and Current Contents service for the Commission's staff exclusively.
- Referral Service.
- Literature searches for extensive queries, which are recorded on specially designed forms, and these records are normally used for subsequent reference.
- Current Awareness and List of New Additions circulation.
- Arrangement of Inter-Library Loans where possible.

- Photocopying.

Some problematic factors that militate against optimal capacity functioning at the internal level include:-

- Financial constraints which have stagnated overall development, acquisition and other purchases.
- The absence of a subject specialist or personnel with adequate knowledge of the socio-economic field to strengthen efforts to reflect balanced collection - building, more effective promotion for the use of information by decision and policy-makers, and more relevant and timely information dissemination.

Problems encountered within the wider networking context may be enumerated as follows:-

- Inadequate communication facilities between the National Focal Point and ECLA. An example of this problem is manifested in the amount of time entries take to reach the Regional Focal Point, hence the delay in appearance of submissions on expected issues of CDCC Current Awareness Bulletin and/or CARISPLAN Abstracts.
- There is no feed-back regarding reasons why some entries submitted do not reappear in the abstracts. However, from conjecture, inadequate staff, time and duplication may be reasonable assumptions for explanation.
- There is still a lack of knowledge and awareness of the information systems amongst a significant amount of the information users and handlers community.
- There is still an acute shortage of professionals and/or adequately qualified personnel to manage, organise and conduct activities especially within the less developed or under-developed units of some organisations and departments.
- Shortage of professionals within the National Focal Point hampers active and more dynamic co-ordination activities, particularly with regards to sensitization, provision of guidance and advice to individual units, even if request is made by the relevant authorities

within the parent organisation. In addition a mini-computer is at the disposal of the centre, but no staff is qualified to operate it, although there is awareness of its potential usefulness.

- Compilation of the National Planning Bibliography is still in the planning stage, and the question of comprehensiveness is a foremost matter of concern. Owing to the fugitive nature of this type of publication, it is hardly likely that there will be complete capture by the General National Bibliography. The problem will not improve significantly when the specific subject bibliography is considered, because there is still the problem of the absence of a well defined declassification system. In addition, there is poor dialogue and communication between and amongst librarians/information handlers and the unestablished and frequently unknown Ministries, as well as departmental publishers.

Most of the participating units who are on the CIS mailing list have complained about either not receiving any of the CIS publications at all, or if they do arrive, this is only on a very irregular basis.

2. - Impact of the System ^{on} the National Infrastructure (Including Information Infrastructure)

It is perhaps reasonable to assume that the information community has felt the adverse impact of the current economic crisis more than any other sector. This opinion may be clearly supported by the internal financial status of most information units, who had to drastically cut down on or abandon the idea of embarking on ventures that involve financial transactions, particularly when foreign exchange is involved. Hence, the drastic decline in acquisitions, (unless via gifts and exchange programmes) and general stagnation in improvement of equipment, furniture and various kinds of working materials.

As a result of this unfortunate situation, there is even a lesser degree of active participation by the relevant policy and decision-making

authorities to influence ventures aimed at fostering library, information and documentation Services development. It is advisable that whenever the Library Association or individual professionals attempt such promotion, assistance, particularly from Foreign Agencies, should always be taken into consideration in order to minimise futility. This does not imply that the government does not recognise and admit the importance of a strong and well developed national information System; but dynamism and initiative are adversely affected by financial constraints as well as other factors with the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

This crisis is perhaps one of the major factors that hindered any further development of the initial proposals for NACOLADS - Guyana; National Council on Libraries, Archives and Documentation Services by an ad hoc committee from the National Library Association and some measure of promotional activities organised by the CIS.

Nonetheless, the onus is still on the National Library Association to take the initiative and provide the relevant authorities with the right kind of advice and urge the launching of the project, even if it is done with the assistance of foreign expertise and finance. During the past year, the Library Association has assumed a more dynamic role, and its activities included organising various short training programmes for paraprofessionals, public lectures involving academics from various disciplines and a more frequent publication of the Associations Bulletin. If this trend is continued, more positive actions should be in the not too distant future.

The CIS has provided some impetus for the realisation of some of these programmes, especially those dealing with training. Some of them were really follow-up programmes of the workshops held within the region, as well as the country in order to ensure optimal utilization of knowledge imported and the sharing of experiences. A most recent example is the User Education Workshop scheduled to be conducted shortly by the Library Association. Resource personnel have already been recruited amongst the participants of the CIS Regional User Education Workshops.

3. - Use of the system as reflected by statistics kept by the National Focal Points and by the participating centres

In March 1982, the National Focal Point conducted a preliminary study to investigate the available resources for organising the National Socio-Economic Network of Planning Information Units in the country. From this survey, a total of twenty-five (25) units were identified under wider subject viz:- Academic and Research, Science and Technology, Economic and Social Research, Law, Politics, Administration and Public Services. Amongst these units, there has been submission of entries averaging approximately ten (10) Bibliographic Record Cards (BRC) per month, according to the amount of research and reporting done by their parent organisation. If entries are not received by the third week within a particular month, the units are contacted via telephone or specially designed reminder letters. It is not difficult to identify defaulting units, because a complete record of each contributor is kept on Monthly Kardex Cards. These records reflect the exact amount of entries submitted by each unit, as well as the frequency.

As a motivation device, a quarterly list of local entries submitted to ECLA has been prepared by the Focal Point and recirculated to each participating unit so that all may take note of the regular contributor. So far, a total of three (3) such issues have been distributed.

A Directory of Profiles of each participating unit is also in publication. This directory includes data on the identity, services and specific subject coverage of each unit. It may be used as a reference tool for both information users and handlers, because access is by Unit's Name, General and specific subject.

Since the organisation of the system, the general sharing and co-operation activities amongst most units have been more formalised, as well as improved considerably.

A manifestation of such activities is demonstrated in the willingness of the CARISPLAN Committee at the University of Guyana to render assistance in processing work sheets at the National Focal Point in the absence of the Co-ordinator, if the volume of work is too much. Most of these units have also been contributing materials and stationery to ensure that publications for the Network is completed.

In addition, sixteen (16) of the twenty-five (25) active participants in the National System have been receiving both the CDCC Current Awareness Bulletin and the CARISPLAN Abstracts. In the case of four (4) of these, viz:- University of Guyana Library, Caricom Secretariat, Bank of Guyana, Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance, extensive use of the publications have been made by both select users and information handlers. In the case of the others, Use~~x~~ was ^{made} ~~confirmed~~ ^{to} ~~by~~ members of the latter group, hence some degree of ignorance by some users in the decision-making category.

As the table indicates, use of the CIS and the services it offers are influenced by two salient factors; this is, the knowledge and awareness of the existence of the system and its main activities, as well as the access Units have to the services. From the survey conducted specifically to assess the value of the system, the phenomena examined were awareness (of its existence), purposes for using the publications, value of the publications with regards to scope and coverage and the format or layout with regards to retrieval.

In discussing awareness, the variable considered was the use made of the system as indicated by Publications and services. It was observed that nine of the eighteen participants or fifty percent had access; nine or fifty percent had knowledge, but no access; two or eleven decimal nine percent had no knowledge. This is a clear indication that more promotion activities should be conducted for the interest of participating units, and the wider user community within and outside of those units.

A total of seven or 38.8 percent of the units used the publications as a current awareness tool; eight or 44.4 percent for reference purposes; four or 22.2 percent for acquisition and four or 22.2 percent make the publications accessible to their users.

With reference to the value of entries for assisting to satisfy users requirements within particular units; one or 5.5 percent felt that there was great value; seven or 38.8 percent, significant value, one or 5.5 percent, little value.

As regards format or layout of entries to effect ease in retrieval by specificity of terms used for retrieval by subject (descriptors), results showed that nine or fifty percent of the units considered terms to be adequate, because only nine units had access to them.

From the overall picture, the statistics reflect the lack of or hindrance to access to the services of the CIS on a wide scale. Therefore, more effectiveness may be achieved if this problem is at least minimised.

4. - Types of Requests answered by the System

The fact that the system is capable of being very useful is widely recognised, but difficulty in gaining access is a hindrance. CARICOM Secretariat was the only unit satisfied with the services offered because they were in a position to finalise their own arrangements to achieve timely response to requests for documents, bibliographies and queries by telephone. The other units that have access to the system have not been able to utilise the facilities, because the document delivery service was not timely, and receipt of the publications was not regular. ?

5. - General Suggestions/Recommendations

- There should be more frequent user education programmes for all categories of information users and ^{specialists} handlers; Periodical information and update rap sessions should be conducted with representation from government authorities and information handlers.
- The network should begin the publication of a Newsletter, or in the absence of that, prepare articles for a relevant state-of-the art publication as the Library Association Bulletin.
- Developed units indicate willingness to render Technical Assistance to those in the process of being established.
- These developing units should indicate needs for assistance to a central body as the Library Association or the National Focal Point.

- The National Focal Point should be upgraded in appearance, equipment, furniture and services so that the facilities may be accessible to all other units.
- If direct contact with the participating units is difficult, then the focal point should take the responsible to ensure that. Hence, publications, etc. could be handled centrally by the Focal Point for subsequent delivery.

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NR:dh

July 1, 1983

Summary Tables

Use made of the CIS as indicated by awareness of publications and use made by them

Phenomena	Awareness		Purpose for Using Publications		Value of Publications re coverage		Format of Publications			
Variables	Use (made of system)		Use (name of Publications)		Satisfaction (of Users' requirements)		A- Specificity (of terms used)			
							B- Ease (in access to entries)			
Indicators	Publications and services		i. Current Awareness		i. Great Value		A		B	
			ii. Reference		ii. Significant Value		i. Adequate		Difficult	
			iii. Acquisition		iii. Little Value		ii. Inadequate		Easy	
			iv. Accessible to Users		iv. No Value at all		iii. Mediocre		marginally improved	
Content of Indicator (re-amount)	Amt.		Amt.		Amt.		Amt.			
	i. Access	9	i.	7	i.	1	i.	9	i.	9
	ii. Knowledge but no access	9	ii.	8	ii.	7	ii.	-	ii.	9
	iii. no Knowledge	-	iii.	4	iii.	1	iii.	-	iii.	-
		iv.	4	iv.	-					

Response Rate

Amt. Distributed	Amt. Returned	No. Response	Response Rate
25	18	7	72%

The seven units that did not respond were probably affected by the late distribution of the questionnaires