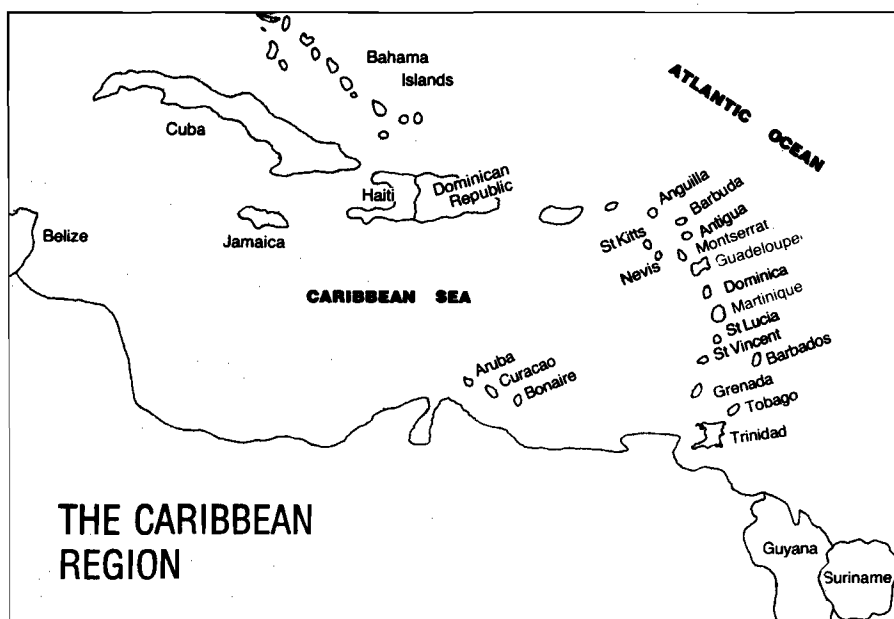


CARIBBEAN
DEVELOPMENT
AND
CO-OPERATION
COMMITTEE



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IMPACT OF THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY SECRETARIAT; WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO CARISPLAN ABSTRACTS

Prepared by
Carol Collins
Chief - Information and Documentation Section
CARICOM Secretariat

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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

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An assessment of the impact of CARISPLAN Abstracts has to be related to the nature of the institution or organization using the abstracts, the use which is being made of it, and the stated purpose of the Abstracts.

The CARICOM Secretariat, referred to hereinafter as the Secretariat, is involved in a large number of activities at the sub-regional level ^{1/} in the Caribbean. These activities are directly related to the national development programmes of member countries of the Caribbean Community. The involvement of the Secretariat is both at the policy advisory and operational levels, though both aspects of involvement do not necessarily apply to each activity.

The areas in which the Secretariat is chiefly involved are:

- Economic development policy
- Trade matters including customs policy
- Tariffs, etc.
- Agriculture
- Industry
- Transportation
- Health
- Education
- Culture
- Youth and sport
- Women in development
- International relations
- Legal affairs
- Information

The list is not exhaustive.

Within any of the above-mentioned areas, the Secretariat can be mandated by member governments to investigate or assist in a particular aspect of an area of activity.

Within the scope of the Secretariat's work programme then, the socio-economic planning materials abstracted by the Caribbean Information System in CARISPLAN are very relevant.

Because the integration movement is concerned with twelve English-speaking territories, and Bahamas, a part of the coverage of CARISPLAN is not of direct relevance to the Secretariat. This is not to imply that comparative developments in all CDCC member countries are not considered important to the process of integration, or as informing decisions regarding the direction and emphasis of aspects of integration, or that the Secretariat does not acquire material relating to these countries. However, it does mean that CARISPLAN is consulted primarily for the information about the English-speaking Caribbean, and less frequently, though with greater urgency at those times, on matters relating to the non-English-speaking Caribbean territories. With greater urgency, because CARISPLAN is the only abstracting service that brings together material from the whole Caribbean, and has therefore become an important search tool for information in the Spanish, French, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean.

It should be noted also that the Secretariat allows its information and documentation facilities to be used by non-staff members, so that bona fide researchers, university students and teachers in secondary schools, are able to consult the collection. For this group, CARISPLAN Abstracts has become a sure guide to material on the Caribbean, especially concerning on-going activities.

The comments on the abstracts given below are based on the issues available at the Secretariat, namely, 1980, numbers 1, 2, 3, 1981 number 4, 1982 number 5. The numerical sequence from 1981 suggests that it is an annual publication, though the frequency is given as quarterly.

The documents and publications abstracted in the 1980 issues, understandably covered a series of non-current material, and is in keeping with the stated policy of coverage given as 1970 onwards. The general reaction of the Secretariat staff to those issues was that it was a useful service but that the material included was not of immediate importance to the 1981/82 work programme. Many of the items included in these issues, had already been acquired by the Secretariat, so that the appearance of abstracts of works already seen did not make an impact.

However as the CARISPLAN Abstracts is not routed, it was recommended that certain items should be brought to the direct attention of those members of staff likely to need them for future reference. For clarification, it should be pointed out that the staffing structure at the Secretariat does not allow for a team of researchers to be constantly working on select topics. The staff consulting information materials is the same one that is more often than not working in the field, and constantly pressed for time, so that a display of immediately relevant material always has more appeal and impact than the type which will be need to research a topic, at a later date.

The 1981 and 1982 issues of CARISPLAN Abstracts proved to be progressively more useful to the Secretariat. Approximately 70% of the items related to the CARICOM territories excluding statistical reports were not available in the Secretariat. CARISPLAN Abstracts has therefore also become a valuable selection and acquisition tool, enhanced by the resumé of publications and documents. Furthermore, as the Secretariat's policy is not to acquire all material of relevance to its work programme, but to share resources where feasible with other institutions in the region, CARISPLAN Abstracts has also become a valuable location tool.

The abstracts have also proved useful in the compilation of subject bibliographies, in the identification of recent material on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (in the case of number 5, 1982). The capture of unpublished documents so often difficult to identify and trace is one of the key attributes of the publication, and the increase of this type of material over the published items would enhance the usefulness especially to researchers and mission-oriented personnel. What is noticeably lacking is the inclusion of official documents from the Regional Organizations and research papers of relevance to the Caribbean, emanating from the academic institutions. The abstracts have been useful also, because of the fairly detailed abstracting technique employed, as a handy compendium on a range of activities in the Caribbean.

In seeking to improve the CARISPLAN Abstracts, some of the observations made by the users at the Secretariat, including the staff of the Information and Documentation Section which provides library and information services are instructive. It is felt that a more balanced choice of entries from the four language groupings would improve the coverage of the publication and make it more representative of the Caribbean.

The display of "categories by purpose" is of immense assistance in guiding those without the time to peruse the publication. The addition to the subject index of the symbols identifying the categories could save time for some users.

For the uninitiated and for those who prefer to go straight to the index rather than read the detailed explanations in the first section of the publication, the indexes seem to dominate the publication because of the different types, as well as their appearance in three languages. Even for those who use the Abstracts regularly, that section is a bit cumbersome to handle.

The majority of users at the Secretariat consult the subject and author indexes only, and these are seen as most important in accessing the abstracts, followed by the geographic and then conference indexes.

The symbol index has not yet been used for identifying material in the Secretariat.

Recommendations for effecting improvement include the following:

- (a) Seek to increase the coverage of unpublished material from all sources in the Caribbean and lessen the number of published works that can be identified in national bibliographies.
- (b) Seek to improve the coverage of current material, bringing it to within three years of the date of appearance of the document. Provide a cumulated index every three years.

- (c) Employ colour coding for the easy identification of the subject and author indexes, including the corporate author index.
- (d) Add, if it is feasible, the symbols for the "display of categories" to the subject index.
- (e) Seek to improve the mix of entries from the various language groupings in each issue of the publication.

Most of these recommendations will depend not on the Caribbean Documentation Centre, but on the response of the participating centres, including the CARICOM Secretariat, which has started its programme of declassification, so that some of the official documents of the Caribbean Community will be made available to a wider audience. Appended herewith for information is the decision taken by Heads of Government in 1982 to classify documents.

It is hoped also that more documentation will be available from the Caribbean Development Bank, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and the ECLA Office for the Caribbean.

A useful addition to the abstracts would also be the inclusion of academic papers and relevant theses, as well as indications of the fact that particular documents have been translated which fall within the scope of CARISPLAN Abstracts.

REFERENCE

1. Subregional is used here to distinguish the Caribbean Community from the wider Caribbean.